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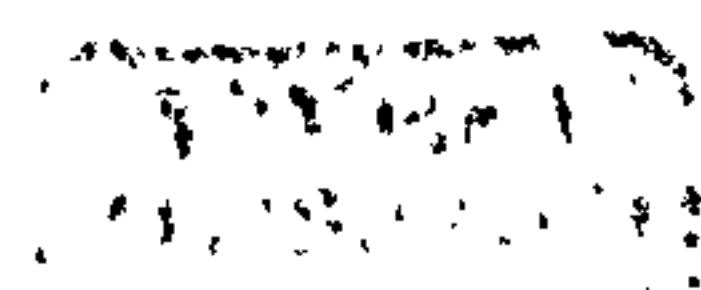
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The Fiction of Identity: Hugh Miller and the Working Man's Search for Voice in
Nineteenth-Century Scottish Literature

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University of Glasgow
Department of Scottish Literature
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Thesis Abstract

This thesis is the first critical study to examine Miller across the full range of his intellectual contribution. Existing studies of Hugh Miller have been preoccupied with Miller's biography and with the scandal of his suicide in 1856, with many commentators viewing Miller as the quintessential 'divided man'. This thesis, however, seeks to demonstrate that, far from producing a work of irreconcilable tensions, Miller's work, taken as a whole, demonstrates a remarkably coherent response to the many contemporary intellectual and social issues he engages with.

Part One examines the politicised literary climate of nineteenth-century Scottish letters, and in particular the cultural phenomena of the 'peasant poet' made fashionable after Burns. I examine Miller's entrance into literary circles as the self-fashioned persona of 'the Cromarty stonemason'. By adopting various modes of dress, cultural reference and working-class affiliation, Miller negotiated a simultaneous position of contemporary literary appeal as 'peasant poet' and popular identification as 'man of the people'. Miller sought to attain the authority of the man of letters to give a voice to the neglected concerns of the working man and offer radical judgement upon the social and moral conditions of his times.

Part Two traces Miller's search for an authoritative vehicle of self-expression across the genres of poetry, short fiction and folklore before attaining recognition as a man of science and an influential social and religious commentator as editor of *The Witness* newspaper (1840 – 1856). The initial literary anxiety manifest in Miller's early writing eventually matures by the late 1830s into a voice of considerable polemical force. Due consideration is given to the subjects of Miller's journalism - however, the primary concern in the analysis of this thesis is with the development of Miller's literary and rhetorical style and the features of Miller's evolving social and religious critique.

In Part Three two significant features of Miller's socio-literary approach are considered. Chapter ten examines Miller's broader socio-literary agenda, which insisted upon autobiography's capacity to reclaim a marginalised working-class voice, and his tentative moves towards the exposition of a working-class canon. The final chapter attempts to place Miller in his proper relation to the intellectual thinking of the time and to suggest that his adherence lay toward intellectual moderation and liberality rather than the religious partisanship with which he has become associated. Finally, it is suggested that Miller's own alienation from the Free Church during the late 1840s is emblematic of the wider cultural atomisation affected by the Evangelical hegemony and religious factionalism that featured in Scottish cultural life after 1843.

In conclusion, and contrary to the interpretation of internal paradox and division offered by Miller's most recent critics, it is argued that the corpus of Miller's work expresses a desire for social equality and cohesion and that his philosophical and religious position was one of synthesis and resolution. Miller's contribution to the literature of the nineteenth century has been obscured by atomistic study and Romantic cliché. This thesis asserts the literary importance of Hugh Miller and his underestimated influence and proposes a comprehensive and critical analysis of the nature of his achievement.

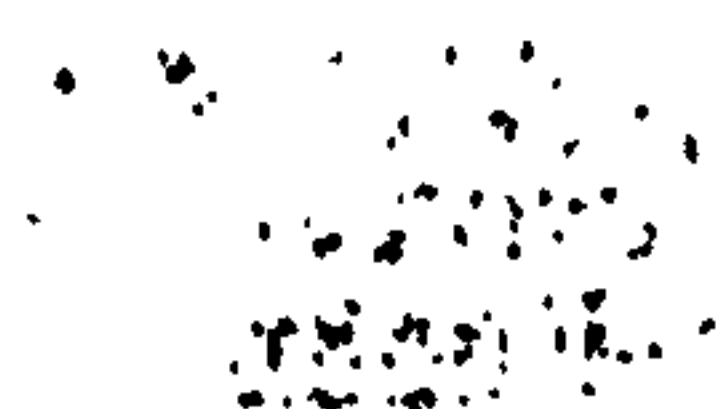


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Abbreviations

*Primary texts**

PJM	<i>Poems of a Journeyman Mason</i>
S&L	<i>Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland</i>
HL	<i>Letters on the Herring Fishing</i>
T&S	<i>Tales and Sketches</i>
LTB	<i>Letter to Brougham</i>
ORS	<i>The Old Red Sandstone</i>
CB	<i>The Cruise of the Betsey</i>
RG	<i>Rambles of a Geologist</i>
FI	<i>First Impressions of England and its People</i>
FC	<i>Footprints of the Creator</i>
S&S	<i>My Schools and Schoolmasters</i>
TR	<i>The Testimony of the Rocks</i>
SBG	<i>Sketch Book of Popular Geology</i>

*Secondary reference***

LB Hugh Miller's Letterbook 1829 – 1835 (unpublished)

* Full bibliographical details of all Miller's primary texts can be found in the bibliography.

** Miller's personal correspondence of 1829-1835 can be found in 'Hugh Miller's Letterbook', a manuscript of all Miller's letters, sent and received, and copied in his own hand, in the New College Library, Edinburgh. The 'Letterbook' is divided into three sections; the first containing letters to and from William Ross and John Swanson between May 1825 and January 1827. These are unnumbered and unpaginated. Section II, letters 1-4 are Miller's correspondence to and from William Ross, including some poems, dated July 1821 – 1822. Letters 5-6 are entitled To Mr *****, dated 1833.

Section II is paginated pp. 1-40. Section III contains the main body of Miller's correspondence between 1829 and 1839. These letters are numbered and paginated pp. 1-703.

Wherever possible, I have drawn from Miller's 'Letterbook', primarily from Section III. All 'Letterbook' correspondence is referenced as 'LB', followed by the number of the letter in the 'Letterbook' i.e. (LB23) except when drawn from sections I and II, where I have included the section reference i.e. (LB SII) along with the date, as given. Peter Bayne, via his correspondence with Lydia Miller, appears to have had access to several letters not copied into the 'Letterbook,' notably those to William Ross in 1823 and Miller's 'conversion' letters to John Swanson in 1822, as well as letters after 1839. Where this is the case, I refer the reader to Bayne.

Acknowledgements

My sincerest thanks to my supervisor, Professor Douglas Gifford, my inspiring teacher these many years. And to Theo Van Heijnsbergen for your friendship and wise words.

Thank you also to Kelsang Gyatso, for all that you are, to my sisters Carey, Jennifer and Sarah-Jane and to Russell for being there at the other end.

Introduction:

Hugh Miller: Radical Synthesis in the Dialectical Nineteenth Century

At once a folklorist, poet, geologist, journalist and religious commentator whose works extend across the genres of fiction, autobiography, ethnography, didactic essay, epistle and scientific discourse, Hugh Miller is a figure that is hard to categorise. It is the intention of this thesis to demonstrate that the multiple voices and the generic eclecticism of Miller's writing reveals a palpable search for a literary voice. But this is not, as Miller's critical inheritance has tended to suggest, evidence of an anxiety about his existential identity. Rather, Miller's eclecticism demonstrates the search for an appropriate literary vehicle by which to issue his distinctive agenda. Furthermore, it is argued that as a self-taught working man raised in rural Scotland and embarking on a literary career in the post-enlightened imperial age, Miller was aware that in order to achieve literary authority he needed to find a voice capable of appealing to the cultural establishment.

Miller's writing, particularly that which he produced after 1840, when he became editor of *The Witness* newspaper in Scotland's literary capital, expresses a voice of considerable power and authority. Ultimately then, Miller was able to achieve literary eminence and to utilise that status to articulate the neglected concerns of the traditional rural Scots labouring experience. Rather than manifesting cultural and philosophical anxiety, as critics have recurrently suggested, this thesis proposes that the many voices embodied in the figure of Hugh Miller are part of a self-conscious mediation, within his public persona, between the dialectics of literary authority and political and social challenge in nineteenth-century Scotland and that

Miller's radical achievement lies in his synthetic resolution to the many social, cultural and philosophical confrontations of his age.

Who is Hugh Miller? Critical Approaches 1850 – 2003

Literary posterity has not been kind to Hugh Miller. The negotiation of the question, 'who is Hugh Miller?' troubled his own contemporaries in the nineteenth century and remains the seminal concern of Miller's modern critics today. The Australian academic, Michael Shortland, who has done most in recent years to uncover the neglected figure of Hugh Miller, speaks of 'the frustration we feel at having no satisfactory answer to the question 'who, finally, was Hugh Miller?''¹ As a literary figure, Miller has been largely overlooked. There are several critical responses to his geological findings in the scientific journals of his time, but since his death, little attention has been paid to his writing corpus. The few records that remain, recording impressions of Miller as he appeared to his contemporaries, present a picture of a man at once regarded as a humble working-man writer and simultaneously as a genius driven to madness. In the years following his suicide in 1856, Miller's radicalism, like that of Burns, was posthumously sanitised by the literary fashion for the Romantic genius popularised in the nineteenth century by the writings of Goethe and the lives and early deaths of poets such as Chatterton, Keats and Shelley. The riddle that Miller presented provoked a spate of biographical studies so obsessed with the apparent paradoxes of Miller's life that his literary achievement was all but obscured.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the imaginative appeal of Miller as fatally divided between antagonistic beliefs and aspirations has persisted. Unable to decipher the many ambivalences and complexities that Hugh Miller presented to his

¹ Michael Shortland, *Hugh Miller's Memoir: From Stonemason to Geologist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 76.

literary audience, critics have grasped at the solution of paradox, suggesting that Miller was a man inherently and fatally rent in two. Moreover, the critical reputation of Miller has been beset by one further, but significant flaw. No Hugh Miller specialist yet has considered the full range of Miller's work. Therefore, there are specialists singly in Miller as geologist, in Miller as folklorist, in Miller as essayist and man of letters. In the recent international conference on Hugh Miller, organised by the National Trust for Scotland, discussion was divided into three concurrent symposiums: Ethnography and Folklore, Geology and Natural History and Church and Society with delegates subscribing to attend one symposium only. The effect was that Miller's achievement was fractured and that there was virtually no opportunity to discuss the cross-relation of Miller's thinking. As a result of the various generic disciplinary approaches being applied, the corpus of critical writing on Hugh Miller becomes, itself, somewhat fractured. Currently, there exists insufficient analyses into the themes and preoccupations *connecting* Miller's generic range as well as a lack of genuine enquiry into Miller's own literary and philosophical objectives and achievements *as a whole*. The splintering of criticism into various generic categories (which is also a feature of the 1996 collection of essays on Miller edited by Michael Shortland - the only collection of its kind) serves to reinforce the idea that Miller's life and work is characterised by fracture and division.² A synthetic and expansive

² The critical perspectives introduced by Shortland's collection and the recent National Trust for Scotland conferences have provided much valuable analysis into the life and work of Hugh Miller. However, while the National Trust for Scotland conferences proved a useful means of extending interest in Hugh Miller studies, the aim of the bicentenary, I might suggest, extended beyond a purely academic one. The conferences, organised by the Cromarty Arts Trust in association with the National Trust for Scotland, appear also to have served as a platform for local economic and political interests. Certainly, the 'rediscovery' of Hugh Miller has allowed for the promotion of the Black Isle, an area currently without its own centre of trade and industry. Tourism, centred around the 'marketing' of Hugh Miller, may serve to fill this gap. Such an intention is illustrated by the recent production of a 'Hugh Miller beer' - distilled in the Black Isle and marketed by the National Trust - a facile tourist initiative wholly inappropriate to a teetotal Free Church figure such as Miller. Moreover, the final

approach to Miller's work is required to rectify such perspectives and provide greater insight into an important literary figure too long obscured by misapprehension and misrepresentation.

Briefly reviewing the critical evaluation of the nineteenth century, which is predominantly biographical and which tends to offer somewhat hagiographic or sensationalist depictions, presenting Miller as either the sagacious Victorian man of letters or as a tormented genius driven to madness and self-destruction, I wish primarily to examine Miller's two central twentieth-century critics: George Rosie and Michael Shortland. These writers have offered the most comprehensive and in-depth studies of Hugh Miller to date. Moreover, it is Rosie's *Outrage and Order*, a collection of Miller's journalism, and Shortland's edited collection of essays on Miller and his republication of Miller's autobiographical letter to Principal Baird that have done most to shape current interpretations of the figure of Hugh Miller. I wish then to offer some preliminary responses to Rosie and Shortland's critical interpretations and to challenge the prevailing reception to Hugh Miller which has, until now, tended to portray a divided and paradoxical figure, driven to suicide by chronic internal

international conference on Hugh Miller, in 2003, was actually concluded by a plenary discussion on the future of the University of the Highlands and Islands Millennial Institute.

Reasonable these pragmatic economic and political motives may be. But from an academic point of view, the danger of drawing together a large scale conference on Hugh Miller, at this early stage in his re-emergence to academic studies, is that speakers are only equipped to apply their particular specialist knowledge to Hugh Miller rather than vice versa. Out of the forty-three papers delivered throughout the three-year period of the Hugh Miller conferences, almost half focused on contextual and comparative studies that bore only an approximate relation to Miller himself. Ian Fraser's interesting paper on 'Place-names of the Cromarty Firthlands,' for example, made only one reference to Hugh Miller, ('It is tempting to speculate that Hugh Miller found such linguistic problems of great fascination...') throughout the entire discussion. (Other illustrative examples of titles include: 'Edinburgh in 1840: The Athens of the North', 'Cromarty: Highland Gateway for Emigrants sailing to British North America 1784 – 1855', 'William Smith (1769 – 1839) and the Search for English Raw Materials: Some Parallels with Hugh Miller and with Scotland', 'Learning from Cromarty: The Lessons of Town and Landscape', 'Hugh Miller in an Age of Microscopy' and "'Altogether A Delightful Country': The Free Church Settlement of Otago (South Island, New Zealand)').

Despite the conferences' subtitle, 'Hugh Miller in context', a difficulty arises whereby Miller is in danger of being engulfed by contextualisation. While my own, preliminary and explorative work cannot claim special authority on Hugh Miller and attempts only to speculate on the state of current criticism, the foregrounding of the *man* and *writer* appears crucial to an advancement in the critical understanding of Hugh Miller's life and work.

tensions. Instead this thesis will consider a literary figure whose public persona enacts a self-conscious mediation of working-class and establishment literary values and which, in achieving a position of literary authority offers a profoundly synthetic vision. Rather than a figure of paradox, Hugh Miller will be shown to articulate a radical resolution of the many cultural anxieties, class confrontations and philosophical crises that beset the turbulent nineteenth century in which he lived.

The Biographical Riddle: Miller's Early Critics 1858-1911

In his own times, Miller presented a challenging figure even to those that knew and worked with him. The riddle that Miller presented provoked a spate of biographical studies in the years immediately after his death. In 1858 Thomas N. Brown responded to popular interest with the publication of his biography *Labour and Triumph*.³ Brown opens with the assertion that 'Hugh Miller is Scotland's representative man' ostensibly because he avoided the prejudices of Scott and the immorality of Burns in 'speaking for the people of Scotland'. Despite this bold opening statement, Brown's study tends largely to re-cover ground already familiar from Miller's own autobiography, *My Schools and Schoolmasters* (1854) and therefore, adds little to our understanding of the figure of Miller himself. In 1896 the same publishing house issued another biography of Miller, written by W. K. Leask.⁴ His *Hugh Miller*, written as part of the Famous Scots Series, offers general statement and focuses on psychological readings of Miller himself rather than penetrative analysis of his literary output while his conclusion focuses mainly on Miller's geologic achievements. Most comprehensive, is Peter Bayne's two-volume biography of

³ Thomas Brown, *Labour and Triumph: The Life and Times of Hugh Miller* (London: Richard Griffon & Co, 1858).

⁴ W. Keith Leask, *Hugh Miller Famous Scots Series* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1896).

Miller's life written in co-operation with Miller's widow and published in 1871.⁵ Bayne's account, such is the power of the biographer, has done much to shape the posthumous image of Hugh Miller. But his narrative is far from objective. A close friend of the Millers, his depiction lacks scrutiny, often falling into sentimental eulogy. And while Bayne offers some useful critical analysis of Miller's literary influences and the record is invaluable for its extensive documentation of his personal correspondence, his biography fosters a rather one-dimensional depiction of Miller; that of the sagacious and virtuous self-made Victorian that Miller himself, and his widow, would have chosen to promote.

If the depictions of his early biographers were somewhat lacking in critical scrutiny, then David Masson's *Memories of Two Cities* in 1911 is at least an attempt to offer some answers as to the complexities of Hugh Miller. Yet Masson's account leaps over the gaps of comprehension with its somewhat sensationalist depiction. Some fifty years after Miller's suicide it conveniently served to shelve Miller into the stereotype of the crazed genius whose intellectual tensions are tritely analogised as a 'loaded gun'. The account describes Miller as possessing 'the demonic element' identified by Goethe as one of the marks of genius and Masson allies this feature with Miller's 'pagan spirit' claiming that the 'tremendous amount of ferocity in Hugh Miller [...] amounted to a disposition to kill'.⁶ The overall tone of the account is to present Miller as some kind of savage genius who, unbalanced by the pagan forces of supernatural belief, finally lost all grip of reality. Such melodramatic accounts of Miller undoubtedly draw on the nineteenth-century preoccupation with the 'Romantic sinner.' From the Miltonic devil to Goethe's *Faust*, the romantic imagination

⁵ Peter Bayne, *The Life and Letters of Hugh Miller* 2 vols (London: Strahan & Co., 1871).

⁶ David Masson, 'Hugh Miller', *Memories of Two Cities* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1911), pp. 146-157 (p. 155).

increasingly conflated the conception of artistic genius with notions of personal strife and moral ambivalence. The infamy of Burns and Byron in the nineteenth century is emblematic of the period's love-hate fascination with the 'tortured artist.' If Miller's life was free from such scandal then his early mental decline and death certainly offered him up as a figure of internal morbid conflicts, in the manner of a Young Werther, his suicide enacting the ultimate moral transgression of the Victorian age. By taking his own life, Miller, in death, epitomised the Romantic genius, with his propensity towards self-destruction. Yet this kind of melodramatic, and clichéd critical presentation accounts for the tendency for Miller to be obscured by tragic resonance, ironically locating his death as the central event of his life and seeking to interpret his living ideals and actions from the nature of his subsequent deterioration.

W. M. Mackenzie has been one of the few critics to approach Miller from a literary perspective. His account, *Hugh Miller: A Critical Study*⁷ offers a useful survey of Miller's literary influences and prose style. The critique is characterised by the author's nineteenth-century predilection for biography, broad overview, and moral judgement but it contains some valuable insights. Mackenzie is the only critic to have identified the influence of the Scottish common sense philosophers upon Miller's social thinking and to have recognised the constraint of his ecclesiastic role in issuing an independent, radical voice, issues which this thesis seeks to explore in greater depth.

The Solution of Paradox: Twentieth-Century Critical Evaluation

A preoccupation with Miller's life (and death) continued to characterise twentieth-century interpretations of Miller's work. George Rosie in 1981 and Michael Shortland

⁷ W. M. Mackenzie, *Hugh Miller: A Critical Study* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905).

in the 1990s both dedicated large portions of their studies to biographical interpretations of the man himself.⁸ In 1988 Miller's life was made the subject of a one-man play by Stewart Conn.⁹ The play, which represents the tormented interior monologue of the last hours of Miller's life before he committed suicide, confirms the tendency of critics, biographers and audiences alike to view Hugh Miller's life as some kind of puzzle with his death acting as the cryptic clue. Such a preoccupation with the conditions of Miller's decline has, I would suggest, tended to encourage interpretations of Miller which emphasis interior conflict and disunity. Miller's recent critics have tended to make much of the apparent dualism inherent in Miller's bloodline, pitting his Highland inheritance on his mother's side against his father's Cromarty background. (Cromarty lies on the Lowland coast of the Moray Firth.) Rosie has described the cross-match of Highland and Lowland inheritance as 'a near-perfect metaphor for the half-Lowland, half-Highland corner of Scotland that produced him. He was the product of two cultures'. And he goes on:

Interestingly, in one of his early essays (in the *Inverness Courier*) Miller reflected on the difference between Celtic and Saxon Scots and the analysis - which is a bit hackneyed - contains within it a fair description of his own, complex disposition.¹⁰

Miller's essay had proposed that while the Highlander is characterised by an emotional intuition for the external world expressed in heightened description and feeling, the Lowlander is analytical and rather more reserved. This kind of cultural antithesis had become increasingly formulaic during the nineteenth century. The

⁸ George Rosie dedicates the first half of his book, *Hugh Miller: Outrage and Order A Biography and Selected Writings* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1981) to a biography of Miller. Similarly, Michael Shortland's studies of Miller are concerned with autobiographical self-fashioning in Miller's work; his republication of Miller's autobiographical letter to Principal Baird in *Hugh Miller's Memoir: From Stonemason to Geologist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995) is also prefaced with an interpretation of Miller's life and examines Miller's autobiographical depictions.

⁹ Stewart Conn, *Hugh Miller 1802 – 1856* (unpublished). Performed at the inaugural Hugh Miller Conference in Cromarty, October 2000.

¹⁰ George Rosie, *Outrage and Order*, p. 16.

theme of the Highlander (and Highland values) in opposition with the Lowlands is recurrent in fiction from Walter Scott and James Hogg to Neil Munro, Grassie Gibbon and Gunn and is a standard cultural observation that remains to the current day. Nevertheless, Rosie takes Miller's own dualistic approach to cultural influences as a precedent for his examination of the man himself, and proposes that cultural schism was the decisive factor in Miller's own experience. This leads to an interpretation characterised by paradox and portraying a man deeply, internally divided between his imaginative (Highland) and rationalist (Lowland) impulses. Shortland has also taken Miller's dual lineage as a point of reference by which to highlight duality and paradox in Miller's identity: 'Miller attempted but failed to reconcile his father's values and his mother's. The Lowland and Highland dwelt side by side in him in perpetual tension.'¹¹ And in a later essay Shortland again utilises the dual concepts of Highland and Lowland to discuss the geographical location of masculine and feminine values, advocating that Miller's divided cultural identity points to a deeper confusion as to his sexual identity.¹²

While I would concur that Miller's life certainly bears the marks of duality and opposing forces, I do not agree with critics, such as Rosie and Shortland, that duality is intrinsic to Miller's identity, that these forces were insurmountable in the life of Hugh Miller, or that they form the decisive psychological factor behind his eventual suicide in 1856. Rosie has utilised such opposition to define Miller's work: his anthology and biographical interpretation, *Outrage and Order*, which takes a paradox for its title, is a seminal study in re-invigorating interest in Miller's life and work. However, his identification of cultural division as the defining paradox in Miller's

¹¹ Michael Shortland, *Hugh Miller's Memoir*, p. 54.

¹² Michael Shortland, 'Bonneted Mechanic and Narrative Hero: the Self-Modelling of Hugh Miller' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, ed. by Michael Shortland (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 14-76.

make-up appears over-stretched. Cromarty, while lying on the Lowland coast of the Moray Firth, is sheltered in the crook of the Black Isle some ten miles from Inverness. The cultural influences to which the town would have been exposed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would certainly have been more akin to the northern isolation of the Highlands on which it bordered, than the cosmopolitan, pragmatic values associated with the Lowlands further south. Miller's own interest in the cultural difference of the two localities was reflective, I believe, of Miller's general enquiry into the cultural forces of old and new Scotland rather than any conscious or unconscious attempt to unravel the opposing sides of his own nature. Miller's cultural concern with change and continuity may have less to do with psychological division neatly represented by geographical demarcation and more to do with the era of profound transition that he lived through.

Shortland, in the 1990s, applied a new historicist approach to Miller concerned to examine the social and ideological context in which he operated. He identifies two social frameworks within which he views Miller: firstly, the conditions of class politics and writing, and secondly, the parameters of gender construction in the Victorian period. Shortland rightly identifies Miller as responding to a popular interest in working-class autobiography and makes a useful examination of the values propagated in that genre: endeavour, restraint, self-reliance – all values which Miller himself promoted and which are manifest in his own autobiographical depictions. Shortland's primary approach to Miller, however, is rather more controversial. While a number of critics have recognised Miller's tendency towards role-playing,¹³

¹³ David Robb, 'Stand and Unfold Yourself, My Schools and Schoolmasters' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above), pp. 246-265, has identified a degree of self-fictionalisation in Miller's autobiography while David Alston in 'The Fallen Meteor: Hugh Miller and Local Tradition' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, pp. 206-230, notes that

Shortland has taken Stephen Greenblatt's model of 'self-fashioning' from his *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (1980) as the focal point of the analysis and advances the theory that Miller, confused by a lack of strong gender role models, instead performed outward acts of masculine behaviour derived from an archetypal, heroic model of his absent father.¹⁴

No doubt the absence of a paternal model influenced Miller and in adult life he placed a great deal of importance on outward acts of strength and daredevil tests of nerve.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the Victorian period was an age of rigid social distinctions and the separation of the sexes produced exaggerated gender performances as a *de rigour* confirmation of conventional etiquette.¹⁶ In the capital, several literary figures manifested exaggerated 'gender performance' as part of their artistic persona. Professor John Wilson ('Christopher North'), editor of *Blackwood's Magazine*, was similarly fond of his 'manly credentials' and liked to attest his physical strength in sporting competitions.¹⁷ It is almost a by-word of Victorian cultural studies that women too were limited by rigid gender performance within a restrictive code of 'feminine behaviour' and in complement to this, the Victorian man was the antithesis

Miller's local background was utilised in the creation of a literary persona and Bayne has recorded several incidents which illustrate Miller's self-posturing.

¹⁴ Michael Shortland, 'Bonneted Mechanic and Narrative Hero – the Self-Modelling of Hugh Miller' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science* (see Shortland, above). While diverging from Shortland on a number of critical points, I am indebted both to Greenblatt and to Shortland's analysis for my own interpretations of Miller's self-fashioning.

¹⁵ David Masson describes Miller's pleasure in finding that his hat was almost twice the size of most literary men's heads and his enthusiasm for competitive sports while J. R. Robertson, who offered a recollection for Bayne's biography, recalled how Miller challenged him repeatedly to tests of physical strength.

¹⁶ Arlene Young, *Culture, Class and Gender in the Victorian Novel: Gentlemen, Gents and Working Women* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999).

¹⁷ Elsie Swann, in her biography of John Wilson, *Christopher North: John Wilson* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1934), has recorded his 'personal prowess as an athlete and a fighter' and noted his predilection towards displays of physical strength by which he sought to foster an image of himself as the archetypal manly hero, a pose which Swann alludes to in her own description of him: 'Christopher North was laureate not only intellectually, but athletically, for this handsome son of the Muses, whose sonorous Scottish voice had proclaimed his prize poem in the Sheldonian, was also the lusty stripling who astounded the same Oxford society with his incredible leaps in the Christ Church meadows. He achieved feats that became traditions in the University city.' (p. 21)

of femininity: strong, independent, vocal, sexually voracious. Lord Byron, in the years immediately preceding the Victorian age had postured as the archetypal poet-lover, a persona parodied in his creation of the libertine Don Juan. Indeed, one of the foremost literary figures of the early nineteenth century, Byron's particular role-playing reveals the intimate connection between artistic and sexual performance. Artistically, the concept of 'fertility' has been theoretically associated with imaginative abundance and creativity.¹⁸ This idea is explored by Milan Kundera in his philosophical novel, *Life Is Elsewhere* (1986) which penetrates beneath the performance of the 'Don Juan' of Romantic poetry (parodied in the novel by the hero's poetic persona, Xavier) to examine the sexual connotations of the poetic disposition.¹⁹ His novel sets up a corollary between the adolescent longing for heroism and sexual initiation. Much of the poet's creation, Kundera suggests, is a 'house of mirrors' by which the poet projects a world reflecting his own frustrated desires. Indeed, the Romantic Movement was initiated by adolescent, male poets whose concern with the themes of death, heroism and isolation can be seen as elements in the rite of passage to manhood, or indeed the realisation of masculinity.²⁰ Thus, Miller's performance of gender role-playing is most likely to be a response to the precedent of an established archetype of artistic fertility. In his early autobiographical depictions we see Miller projecting 'masculine performance' only in as much as he is imitating the heroic grandeur of the Romantic artist to which he ultimately aspires. It is not masculinity in particular that Miller is enacting but the creative persona in general.

¹⁸ In *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia Press, 1984), Kristeva argues that the semiotic (as realm of bodily urges and desires) is evoked in literature – especially in poetry and the radically inventive 'drives' of modernism and the avant-garde.

¹⁹ Milan Kundera, *Life Is Elsewhere* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986).

²⁰ For my analysis of the gendered tropes of Romanticism, I am indebted to Fiona J. Stafford's discussion of 'The Dangerous Success of Ossian' in her study, *The Sublime Savage: A Study of James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), which identifies the appeal of Ossian's heroism and preoccupation with death as a particularly potent inspiration to the pubescent sensitivity of the English Romantics.

Following Rosie's identification of cultural opposition, Shortland argues that the 'feminised' landscape and values of the Highlands feature in Miller's gender negotiations, and that he affiliated himself to the 'masculine' Lowland identity associated with his father. From this, Shortland concludes that ultimately it was gender insecurity (and perhaps even frustrated homosexuality)²¹ that led Miller to his eventual breakdown in 1856:

And so Miller continued on his frantic way, tormented by morbid fears, virulent fantasies of disempowerment and all manner of unsexing anxieties. He barricaded himself in his study with his treasured books, his fossils, his personal armoury of guns and knives. When he emerged for the last time, gun in hand, he left behind a self in tatters.²²

But such a conclusion is too psychologically narrow, too simplistically Freudian to encompass the complexities that make up Hugh Miller. In fact, this kind of psychoanalytical interpretation leads the critic away from literary appraisal. It tends towards a scrutiny of the individual and internal conflicts of the writer's psyche and eschews the more complex issue of a writer's distinctive and personal relationship to the cultural conditions of his time as represented by his literary output. Certainly, cultural antagonisms exacerbated Miller's insecurities as a working writer and indeed we see Miller enacting various kinds of performance by which to establish a credible literary persona. But the crisis which Miller faced cannot be reduced to one organising paradox nor can it be explained by internal psychological tensions alone.

²¹ Michael Shortland, *Hugh Miller's Memoir*, p. 74.

²² Michael Shortland, 'Bonneted Mechanic and Narrative Hero' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science* (see Shortland, above), p. 56.

during which Miller wrote. The nineteenth century marks a period of rapid social transition and profound ideological confrontation: between the newly politicised classes that had grown up in the wake of the industrial revolution, between the old existential certainties of religious belief and a new philosophical materialism, between traditional culture and modern progress. Such a diagnosis of nineteenth-century Scotland does not draw upon G. Gregory Smith's 'caledonian antisizygy'²³ and the related theoretical paradigm of Scotland as an internally divided nation after 1707. The anxieties of the nineteenth century were, by in large, shared by a Western world experiencing the effects of the European Enlightenment, industrialisation and the ascendancy of scientific rationalism. In his study of Europe in the nineteenth century, Brison D. Gooch describes a period of profound confrontation:

Europe in the nineteenth century was turbulent. An unprecedented wave of progress and change swept over the continent [...] In the nineteenth century many of the improvements predicted by the *philosophes* and rationalists came to pass. Instead of coming, systematically, however, they occurred in rapid and overlapping profusion. Spontaneity and a disregard for order often appeared as hallmarks of the new age. Increased knowledge and its application put traditional values under attack as society was caught up in new and evolving standards and ideologies [...] the new golden age abounded in conflicting impulses, loyalties and frustrations.²⁴

It is the crisis of the nineteenth century in general to which Miller's writing forms a response and not the particular position of Scotland, although Scotland's ambivalent cultural position during that period certainly compounded an attitude of ideological rigidity which could not have aided Hugh Miller.

In this thesis I argue that Miller's ultimate, and unacknowledged, significance lies in his profound synthesis of complex transitional values during a period of social,

²³ G. Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1919).

²⁴ Brison D. Gooch, *Europe in the Nineteenth Century: A History* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1970), pp. 3-4.

cultural position during that period certainly compounded an attitude of ideological rigidity which could not have aided Hugh Miller.

In this thesis I argue that Miller's ultimate, and unacknowledged, significance lies in his profound synthesis of complex transitional values during a period of social, cultural and philosophical anxiety. Gooch defines the basic setting of the nineteenth century as 'the noisy dialectic between the proponents of stability and order, on the one hand, and of change and progress on the other'²⁵ (a dialectic of 'outrage and order' arguably transcribed, in the criticism of the twentieth century, from the temper of the period to the temper of Miller himself). In particular this thesis is concerned with five specific aspects of the dialectical nineteenth century. These are: class division; the twin cultural anxieties of post-Union and post-Enlightenment transition; the so-called nineteenth-century 'crisis of faith' arising from the confrontations between religion, science and scepticism and finally, the religious disputations in Scotland in the years preceding the traumatic Disruption of the Established Church of Scotland in 1843.

Firstly, the European Industrial Revolution catapulted Scotland from an essentially agrarian feudalism to the modern class system – a transition not without conflict. The American and French Revolutions stimulated an increasingly class-conscious society and the working classes, spurred on both by poverty and political disempowerment sought radical change. Eric Hobsbawm writes that 'at no other period in modern British history have the common people been so persistently, profoundly, and often desperately dissatisfied,' a situation which led eventually to 'the high wind of social discontent which blew across Britain in successive gusts between the last years of the wars and the middle 1840s: Luddite and Radical, trade

²⁵ Brison D. Gooch, *Europe in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 4.

Secondly, the cultural impact of the political Union with England was still being experienced by Scotland in the nineteenth century. The 1800s continued the process of political centralization initiated by the 1707 Act of Union and nationalist Scots intellectuals and professionals wrangled with Westminster over political authority in issues of educational and Church reform²⁷ – two of the estates guaranteed autonomy in the Act of Union - but which were regarded by many Scots as falling subject to the centralising power of the British government.

Further cultural tensions arose from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, which marked a profound challenge to the Scottish traditional experience. In particular the Enlightenment was critical of credulous and supernatural belief. 'Trenchard, Shaftsbury and the Deists in England, and Fontenelle, Boulanger and others in France, argued that the popular belief in wrathful Gods in the sky should be interpreted primarily as the sick response of the savage mind, terrified of the unknown and powerless to cope with the forces of Nature. What primitive people feared they turned into objects of grovelling worship.'²⁸ Baron d'Holbach claimed that only the primitive mind believed in souls and angels, devils, witches and other childish fantasies, where mature reason would prove that these did not exist. It was with the Enlightenment that traditional forms of belief were increasingly disparaged and the popular folkloric culture in Scotland increasingly undermined in the light of modern sceptical rationalism.

²⁷ In particular, the nineteenth century witnessed ongoing debates over the political authority of the Scottish General Assembly to decide in matters of Church law (in particular the enforcement of the Toleration Act and Patronage Acts of 1712) and the emergence of the patriotic Association for the Extension of the Scottish Universities, which petitioned Westminster for the right to retain a distinctive programme of Scottish education.

²⁸ Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p.30

popular folkloric culture in Scotland increasingly undermined in the light of modern sceptical rationalism.

If the Enlightenment philosophers were critical of 'irrational' traditionalism 'their real target was Christianity'.²⁹ At the same time science found itself in increasingly open conflict with the Scriptures, particularly as it ventured into evolutionary fields. Writing of the secular challenge to religion in the nineteenth century Hobsbawm has observed that: 'of all the ideological changes this is by far the most profound [and] the most unprecedented.'³⁰ Indeed, several critics have noted the crisis of faith experienced during the nineteenth century.³¹ Apart from the secularising effect of the political and social transformations of the American and French Revolutions, religion was now confronted with the increasing authority of materialist philosophy and scientific empiricism. 'The general trend of the period from 1789 – 1848 was therefore one of emphatic secularisation'³² a trend which profoundly challenged the existential certainties of the former age.

Finally, the nineteenth century saw the emergence of the so-called 'ten years conflict' in the Scottish Church between the ascendant Evangelical Party and the incumbent Moderate Party. The Evangelicals were increasingly critical of the Moderate practice of patronage – a system whereby ministers were elected to serve in parishes by local landowners and heritors rather than the parishioners themselves. The conflict between the Evangelicals and Moderate Parties was to culminate in the historic Disruption of the Church of Scotland when, under the leadership of the

²⁹ Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment*, p. 30.

³⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789 – 1848*, p. 217.

³¹ See, for example, J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1963); *The Critical Spirit and the Will to Believe: Essays in Nineteenth-century Literature and Religions* eds. David Jasper and T.R. Wright (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989); Peter Addinall, *Philosophy and Biblical Interpretation: A Study in Nineteenth-century Conflict* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991).

³² Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789 – 1848*, p. 222.

Established Church on May 18th 1843 to form the Free Church of Scotland. The Scottish historian, T. C. Smout, has noted the ideological consequences of this move: 'The Disruption did indeed rend the temple, and with such shattering force that the Church in Scotland lost all its monolithic character for the remainder of the century.'³⁴

Hugh Miller sought to mediate the confrontations of his age in several ways. For the purposes of the thesis, however, I address only those issues outlined above, as they are negotiated in Miller's life and work. His public persona as 'the Cromarty Stonemason', a persona which he sustained throughout his literary career, sought to mediate between the nineteenth century's polarised worlds of art and labour, between the experiences of the working classes and the bourgeois *literati*. In British letters, Miller's writing articulates both the position of the patriotic Scot and the pragmatic Unionist, while in his composite role as a working-class man of letters Miller sought to testify to the value of traditional culture within the terms of progressive Enlightenment philosophy. Similarly, his geo-theology offers resolution between the extremes of Biblical literalism and rational scepticism to offer a profound synthesis of scientific enquiry and religious faith. Finally, in Scottish ecclesiastic affairs Miller retained an ultimate allegiance to the Evangelical Party. Yet, as the thesis shall attempt to demonstrate, Miller was essentially of a mind with the Moderate intellectual inheritance in Scotland and he sought to synthesise the religious views of the non-intrusion Party with a programme of social and intellectual liberality. In this dialectical age, Miller sought, therefore, to project both a literary persona and a body of work capable of mediating the crises and confrontations of his times.

In his *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) Stephen Greenblatt coins the term of the title to refer to the way in which the rising

³⁴ T. C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People 1830 – 1950*, (London: Fontana, 1987), p. 188.

middle classes of the Elizabethan period defined an aesthetic of the self or, as Greenblatt puts it, 'a sense of personal order, a characteristic mode of address to the world, a structure of bounded desire'³⁵ by which to negotiate a position of submission or subversion in relation to the existing authors of power; then the Church and Monarchy. Self-fashioning can thus be regarded as an aesthetic persona adapted as a means of negotiating, through art, the dialectics of authority and challenge.³⁶ In the

³⁵ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 21.

³⁶ In his Introduction Greenblatt writes that, 'Autonomy is an issue but not the sole or even the central issue: the power to impose a shape upon oneself is an aspect of the more general power to control identity – that of others at least as often as one's own.' From the simultaneous desire to execute the power of one's own will at the same time that one understands the social necessity to restrain the will, is produced the 'resolutely dialectical' conditions of self-fashioning. Several of the so-called 'governing conditions' common to most instances of self-fashioning in Greenblatt's study, apply to Miller.

Greenblatt suggests that one factor that may 'help to explain [these writers'] sensitivity as writers to the construction of identity' is that they tend to 'embody, in one form or another, a profound mobility [...] All of these talented middle-class men moved out of a narrowly circumscribed social sphere and into a realm that brought them in close contact with the powerful and the great. All were in a position as well, we should add, to know with some intimacy those with no power, status or education at all.' Miller's ascension from labouring mason to literary editor illustrates such a social mobility. It is this double-sidedness in relation to social status that, in Greenblatt's assessment, accounts for the dialectical nature of self-fashioning individuals, as both resolutely autonomous and acquiescent to the systems of social authority. Greenblatt thus concludes: '2. Self-fashioning for such figures involves submission to an absolute power or authority situated at least partially outside the self – God, a sacred book, an institution such as church, court, colonial or military institution [...] 3. Self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other – heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist – must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked or destroyed. 4. The alien is perceived by the authority figure either as that which is unformed or chaotic (the absence of order) or that which is false or negative (the demonic parody of order) [...] the alien is always constructed as a distorted image of the authority.' Greenblatt's final 'governing condition' of self-fashioning is that: 'The power generated to attack the alien in the name of the authority is produced in excess and threatens the authority it sets out to defend. Hence self-fashioning always involves some experience of threat, some effacement or undermining, some loss of self.'

It is not my intention to apply Greenblatt's diagnosis of self-fashioning in its full psychological capacity in this thesis. However, as I seek to apply Greenblatt's term, it appears necessary that Miller should illustrate Greenblatt's basic criterion. In brief, Miller can be seen to submit to the ultimate authority of the Calvinist God and Presbyterian Church. The 'Other' identified in Miller's polemic is clearly Catholicism and Erastianism. Arguably, because of Miller's awareness of the threat of (disparaged) irrational forces within his own experience, Miller allies himself with the received rationality of Presbyterianism (evidence of Miller's 'rational' interpretation of Presbyterianism is given in Chapter 4). Catholicism, with its historical truce with pagan culture and its 'primitive' iconoclasm is regarded as a threat to that suppressed irrationality, hence 'the alien' (Catholicism) is perceived by the authority (Presbyterianism/Evangelicism) as 'that which is false or negative (the demonic parody of order)'. Erastianism is regarded as an enfeebling of Presbyterian autonomy and Miller frequently denigrates the Moderate position by conflating it with the 'weakness' of the Catholic Church prior to the Reformation. Finally, the power that Miller attained in defending the Evangelical Party was ultimately to exceed the conduit by which he attained that authority, resulting in his effacement by the powers of the Free Church in 1847 and again in 1849. Arguably, it

self-fashioning of 'the Cromarty stonemason' Miller was to achieve a complex and mutable persona capable of negotiating both the politics of culture and class in nineteenth-century Scotland. Similarly, the search for continual synthesis across the competing discourses of science and religion, philosophy and folklore and the antagonisms of class, culture and ecclesiastic politics is enacted in the complex, multiple voices and positions adopted in Miller's work. Part of Miller's difficulty for modern criticism is arguably, his evasion of generic categorisation. Genre functions to order discourse into hierarchies but as David Chandler and other contemporary genre theorists recognise, the taxonomy of genre is culturally produced. As David Buckingham argues, 'genre is not [...] simply 'given' by the culture; rather it is in a constant process of negotiation and change'.³⁷ As such, genre reflects a subjective categorisation according to a society's prevailing ideological criterion.³⁸ Miller's generic ambivalence resists such ideological taxonomies. His writing can be seen to move across both authoritative and 'weak' genres, between the prestige of the classical poetic 'ode' and the ambivalent status of the folkloric history. As Tony Thwaites *et al* argue, 'in the interaction and conflicts among genres we can see the connections between textuality and power'.³⁹ Miller's generic eclecticism is part of his ongoing attempt to mediate the positions of power and powerlessness.

In this thesis I argue that the complexity and apparent contradictions surrounding the figure of Hugh Miller do not arise, as so many critics have suggested,

was this neglect by those that stood as the authority which Miller had sought to defend, but which in his defence he had over-run, that led to his ultimate disillusionment.

³⁷ David Buckingham, *Children Talking Television: The Making of Television Literacy* (London: Falmer Press, 1993), p.137.

³⁸ Ira Konisberg in *The Complete Film Dictionary* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987), pp. 144 -5 suggests that texts within genres embody the moral values of a culture while John Fiske in *Television Culture* (London, Routledge, 1987) similarly asserts that generic conventions 'embody the crucial ideological concerns of the time in which they are popular'. (p. 110).

³⁹ Tony Thwaites, Davis Lloyd & Mules Warwick, *Tools for Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 104.

from inner paradox but from the incompatibility between Miller's synthetic project and a period marked by cultural, literary and philosophical anxiety. In this Miller is both a reflection of and an implicit challenge to the times in which he lived. The self-conscious creation of 'the Cromarty stonemason' arises from Miller's simultaneous appeal to the literary authority of enlightened, imperial values and the invocation of the neglected radical working voice. The generic ambivalence of his work signifies the complex transactions of textual production in a time of rapid ideological change. His deliberate attempts to bridge the discourses of science and religion, art and labour, folklore and philosophy, Evangelicism and Liberalism emerge both from a personal ambivalence with regard to the shifting values of the nineteenth century as well as a brave attempt at sustained ideological resolution.

***Part One: The Chisel And The Pen:
Carving An Image For The World***

‘Of all his stories he was himself the hero and certainly most wonderful was the invention of the man’

Hugh Miller, *My Schools and Schoolmasters*

Chapter One

The Politics of Literature in Nineteenth-Century Scotland

The Working Man and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Letters

The Scottish world of letters in the nineteenth century emerges from a period characterised by the complex interaction of European, British and distinctively Scottish forces. A newly industrialised, class-conscious society that had witnessed the effects of the American and French Revolutions, a nation that had recently entered into an imperial British Union and a largely Presbyterian country that was facing the impact of sceptical philosophy, scientific materialism and the threat of Erastianism provides the context for the vexed politics of Scottish literature into which Miller entered when he arrived on the literary scene some time in the 1830s.

Eric J. Hobsbawm in his historical study of Europe in the nineteenth century cites 1848 as the climax to the 'age of revolution'.¹ *The Communist Manifesto* was to articulate the politicised taxonomy of class relations in the age of the industrial revolution. By 1848 Scotland had seen rapid industrial growth, with some thirty-five per cent of the population moving out of the rural belts to seek work in the cities.² But these urban workers were to face real economic and social hardships, a dispossession compounded by the fact that they had no political voice to represent them. The American War of Independence had demonstrated the power of large-scale mobilisation in facing one's political aggressors and Thomas Paine's status as champion of the basic political rights of man reached far across the continents, further

¹ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789 – 1848*.

² T. C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People 1830 – 1950*, pp. 8 - 9, 58 – 9.

radicalising an already frustrated indigent working population in Scotland.³ In 1792 the Scottish Friends of the People was formed with the intention of agitating for constitutional reform and political enfranchisement. 1820 saw the so-called Radical Wars with thousands of urban workers calling for national strike action as a protest against poor working conditions and political neglect. Yet the Scottish Reform Act of 1832, on which the Whigs pinned their hopes of appeasing both radical unrest and Tory anxiety, failed to enfranchise some 400,000 adult males of the working population in Scotland.⁴ In 1839, the six-point petition presented by the Chartist movement was rejected, and again during the privations of the 'hungry forties' in 1842 and 1848 when Chartism staged its final call to arms before dwindling in defeat.

In the eighteenth century the expression of radicalism in literature was met with the iron hand of the 1790 'sedition trials'. Writing expressing sympathy with radical ideals or making criticism of the existing powers was actively censored; in 1793 the radical poet, Alexander Wilson was ordered to publicly burn his subversive poem 'The Shark' and writers of that decade could face transportation or were charged with impossible fines that they could ill afford to pay so that imprisonment silenced them instead. Tom Leonard, in the introduction to his collection of the neglected radical poetry of the nineteenth century, *Radical Renfrew*, has identified this period in Scotland as marking the beginning of literary and cultural institutionalisation:

That tradition of Scots [writing] hostile to the status quo [...] expressing conflict and difference of opinion [...] all this was dropped in favour of a shy alliance of writers allowed to keep [...] going within the establishment as it was allowed to

³ Henry Mickle, *Scotland and the French Revolution* (London, Frank Cass, 1969). It should be noted, however, that Paine's political heroism was moderated in Scotland by a Presbyterian suspicion regarding his atheistic and materialist values.

⁴ T.C Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People 1830 – 1950*, p. 233.

exist in Scotland. The angry became the pawky [...] it was anger at the end of a string.⁵

During the nineteenth century the 'pawky' face of Scottish poetry revealed itself in the kinds of facile verse that surfaced in popular anthologies such as the commercially successful *Whistle Binkie* (1832 and later editions). Reflecting upon the decline of powerful satiric and political Scots poetry in the nineteenth century, Edwin Morgan has commented:

For sixty years *Whistle Binkie* must have thought it ruled the roost. Victorian morality took strong root in Scotland and these [...] anthologies, in which you would be hard put to find a dozen really good poems, but which seemed so innocuously comic and sentimental, were carefully devised as instruments of social control.⁶

In order to understand these peculiarly selective visions in the Scottish literature of the nineteenth century, a literary elision actually endorsed by the established literary elite, it is necessary to understand the particular cultural politics at play during this period.

The century preceding the nineteenth was marked by two historically significant events; the 1707 incorporating Union with England and the Scottish Enlightenment. In 1707 the decision to enter into a Parliamentary Union between England and Scotland was regarded by many as an inevitable development of the political changes of the seventeenth century.⁷ For Scotland it was an essentially pragmatic move. The failure of the Darien enterprise in the 1690s had convinced the Scots that partnership

⁵ Tom Leonard, *Radical Renfrew: Poetry from the French Revolution to The First World War by Poets born, or sometimes resident in, the Country of Renfrewshire* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990), pp. xxii – xxiii.

⁶ Edwin Morgan, 'Scottish Poetry in the Nineteenth Century' in *The History of Scottish Literature*, ed. by Cairns Craig, 4 vols (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987-1988), III: *Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Douglas Gifford (1988), pp. 337 – 352 (p. 340).

⁷ 1707 was regarded by many as an inevitable development after the Union of the Crowns in 1603 and the so-called 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 –9 which removed the last Stuart king from the thrones of England and Scotland. See T. C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People 1560 – 1830* (London: Fontana Press, 1972), p. 199.

with their successful imperial sister nation was the best means for Scotland to reap the benefits of colonial expansion. Moreover, culturally, with the works of Milton, Dryden, Pope and the English Augustans, English literature at this time became the most influential in Europe, a model of Locke's 'Age of Reason', which had conquered the primitive iconoclasm of the Restoration Baroque.⁸ As such, English writing had come to represent the pioneering values of eighteenth-century rationalism and classical grace in a nation fast becoming one of the most powerful in the world. Scotland, by contrast, with its recent history tainted by the bloody Killing Times of the seventeenth century, was regarded as a nation still enslaved by religious fanaticism. Scotland had yet to shed the image of rural isolation, clannish barbarity and credulous superstition with which she was associated. Consequently, a feeling of cultural insecurity appears to have beset the Scottish writers of the eighteenth century. David Craig in *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People 1680 – 1830* has argued that the cultural anxiety of the Scottish *literati* in imperial Britain resulted in an artistic 'failure of nerve', producing the great intellectual achievements of the Enlightenment but failing to produce a literature of lasting imaginative worth and genuine cultural engagement.

As a class [the *literati*] strove to cultivate 'politeness', 'elegance', 'deprecation of the low', to a peculiarly intensive degree, for they were themselves anxious to get clear of the backward life which pressed them so close. The town culture of Edinburgh had not produced (it is scarcely surprising) any literature as socially adult or fine as its English equivalent [...] We shall see that the correctness and the studious shunning of the low which made up the ideal of the cultivated class could be kept up only by indifference to much of the life of the country.⁹

⁸ Paul Hazard, *The European Mind 1680 – 1715*, trans. by J. Lewis May (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1964)

⁹ David Craig, *Scottish Literature and the Scottish people 1680 – 1830* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), p.40, 52.

Robert Crawford, in 1992, offered a valuable corrective to Craig's suggestion that the Scottish *literati* were characterised merely by 'a second-hand desire to conform' to English literary standards¹⁰ and instead argues convincingly that the Scottish literature of the period (in the works of Burns, Thomson, Smollett, Boswell, Scott and Carlyle) marks a sustained attempt to introduce Scottish cultural and literary perspectives into a new 'British' literature.¹¹ Nevertheless, their criticism is in agreement in recognising a Scottish *literati* after 1707 that was perceptibly censorious of its own vernacular traits. Crawford describes the linguistic compromises implicated in the Scottish appeal to English cultural standards, noting that, 'aspiring Scots were encouraged to kill off what William Robertson called "those vicious forms of speech which are denominated Scotticisms" [...] To many it appeared that the way to advance as a Scot was to appear as English as possible, while at the same time upholding an ideal of Britishness in which Scotland would be able to play her full part.'¹² Craig's analysis also alludes to the class snobbery implicit in this cultural reorientation: 'Scotticisms, naturally, were censored as such – they voiced the uncouth life of the people [...] For [*literati*] taste, the vernacular has no intrinsic value, as best able to express what is felt personally by a man of creative talent - let alone qualities from which the life of the higher classes might have benefited. Scots is the only appropriate vehicle for the given social stratum [of the lower classes].'¹³

These lower classes had not been party to that cultural shift which had taken place in the upper and middle class, from which the *literati* arose, in aspiring to the

¹⁰ David Craig, *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People*, p.42.

¹¹ Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992). Crawford advances the thesis that Scottish writers attempted to participate in, and to challenge from within, the cultural tenets represented by the prevailing literary voice. 'Boswell's project would examine the John Bull figure of Johnson from the point of view of a Scottish author. While Boswell would anxiously and strongly accent his Scottish position, Smollett, like Thomson, would sometimes accent his much more subtly [...] Robert Burns [...] would adapt all these strategies. It is the nature of their Britishness which marks these writers out as peculiarly Scottish.' (p.55).

¹² Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, p. 24.

¹³ David Craig, *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People*, p. 52, 59.

ideals of the new political centre. Furthermore, the movement to the cities had affected a literary centralisation which marginalized the rural areas of Scotland so that the traditional vernacular cultures which persisted there were increasingly regarded as primitive and out of touch with the new cosmopolitan and enlightened ideals of the capital. The labouring classes that preserved the vernacular Scots were thus not only a political threat, potentially destructive of comfortable economic and social hierarchies, but a cultural one also, in that their retention of traditional beliefs and modes of expression threatened to undermine Scotland's post-Union imperial orientation towards polite British culture. Even the cultural authority of the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment expressed dubiety concerning the value of Scotland's vernacular culture. Its advocacy of historical progression offered Scotland as an example of primitivism emerging into an advancing civilisation while Humean scepticism and the impact of scientific materialism further undermined the tenets of traditional (often supernatural) Scots folkloric belief.

This cultural dialectic of cultivation and crudity was further problematised by the aesthetic values of Romanticism in Scotland, which tended to produce nostalgic depictions of a picturesque past rural age. When Robert Burns first appeared on the Scottish literary scene in 1786 with the publication of his *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* he appealed to the late eighteenth-century cult of the 'primitive' and his work initiated a vernacular revival.¹⁴ His endorsement by the eighteenth-century *literati* as a heaven-inspired rustic satiated a philosophical desire for post-religious¹⁵,

¹⁴ Notably, this was a peculiarly *literary* sanctioning of vernacular culture, an endorsement which allowed for its artistic and picturesque connotations but which vigorously divested the vernacular of its bawdy folk elements, which were considered too coarse for polite tastes. See, for example, L. M. Angus-Butterworth, *Robert Burns and the 18th-Century Revival in Scottish Vernacular Poetry* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1969) and Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries. English Literature and its Background 1760 – 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 35.

¹⁵ Following Chris Baldick's thesis in *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848 – 1932* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) that English Literature developed as a partial response to the nineteenth-

romantic conceptions of individual genius and a cultural desire for the pre-industrial rural idyll. In 1840 John Wilson, then editor of the Tory *Blackwood's Magazine*, penned the hugely influential essay, 'The Genius of Robert Burns' which confirmed the tendency to understand Burns the writer by conflating him with his poetic persona, particularly in those poems meditating on the values of a simple rustic life. In 1828 John Gibson Lockhart's *The Life of Robert Burns* had constructed a presentation of the poet as a 'man of feeling' but which eschewed much of the complexity of Burns's sensuality and worldliness because these offended the polite tastes of the literary culture of which Lockhart was a chief representative.¹⁶ Following the censorious moral tone of literary criticism at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which castigated Burns for his hot-headed radicalism and coarse sensuality, this identification of Burns with the 'peasant cottar' served effectively to domesticate the provocative and radical element in Burns and promote him as a model of fashionable picturesque rusticity and the emblem of a facile 'wha's like us' patriotism. Moreover, Wilson's use of Burns as emblematic of Scotland and of a peculiarly pious, peasant, rural Scotland gave currency to a nostalgic, essentialist nationalism that has been variously adapted for different ideological ends ever since. Indeed, the essentialist Burns-as-nation was first pressed into the service of the so-called kailyard literature of the nineteenth century which, following from Wilson's lead, sought to appropriate the figure of Burns into its ontological representation of a static, unchanging, pastoral Scotland.¹⁷

century crisis of faith, Andrew Nash in his essay, 'The Cottar's Kailyard' (*Robert Burns and Cultural Authority* ed. by Robert Crawford (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1997), pp. 180 – 198) argues that the late nineteenth-century conception of Burns was that of national messiah and poet-deity.

¹⁶ See, for example, Gerard Carruthers, 'Remaking Romantic Scotland: Lockhart's Biographies of Burns and Scott', *Romantic Biography* eds., Arthur Bradley and Alan Rawes (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003) pp. 93 – 108.

¹⁷ Notably, Hugh Miller was one of the few to speak out against this falsification of Burns in his savage attack on 'The Burn's Festival and Hero Worship' in a *Witness* article in 1844. I discuss this article at greater length in Chapter 4.

After Henry Mackenzie's christening of Burns with the rustic appellation of 'Heaven-taught ploughman' in 1786, proletarian poets came to be collectively categorised by their locality and trade in reductive labels that served as a reminder that the artist spoke as a rural working man. A proliferation of Scots working-man poets and writers in the nineteenth century were endowed with derivative titles: James Hogg as 'The Ettrick Shepherd', Allan Cunningham as 'The Nithsdale Mason', Alexander and John Bethune as 'The Fifeshire Forresters', William Thom as 'The Inverury Weaver' and Hugh Miller, 'The Cromarty Stonemason'. The label of peasant poet was to become a useful mechanism for the domestication of those writers who did not conform to 'polite' (bourgeois, British) models of class and culture. However, it must be noted that many of these writers were actually complicit in the promotion of the role of 'peasant poet' following the example of Burns who liked to play up his credentials as the rustic philosopher, aware of its appeal to the fashionable noble savage and the tastes of the literary market. The role of the peasant poet was therefore double-edged. It offered potential literary recognition, but with the limitation that such writers all too often had to perform within the received parameters of a socially and culturally constructed literary persona.

The literature produced by the *literati* in the nineteenth century, as David Craig has noted, suffers from its severance from Scotland's vernacular culture. The anglicised and class-conscious *literati* of Scotland increasingly ignored the harsh realities of a nation experiencing rapid industrialisation. There is virtually nothing in the writing of the nineteenth-century Scottish *literati* that speaks of the religious turmoil of the period, the political upheavals, the overcrowded housing and the poverty, sickness and despair of the industrial poor. In a *Witness* article in 1849 Hugh Miller, observing the upsurge in literature dealing with the subject of the working

classes, called for veracity in fictional representation.¹⁸ During the period of the 1830s and 40s English literature had indeed produced a spate of novels, many of them of lasting literary value, dealing with the effects of industrialisation and the experience of the urban working classes. The list is remarkable; Harriet Martinau's *A Manchester Strike* (1832), Francis Trollope's *Michael Armstrong* (1839) and *Helen Fleetwood* (1839–40), Disraeli's *Coningsby, or The New Generation* (1844) and *Sybil, or The Two Nations* (1845), Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* (1836–7), *Oliver Twist* (1837–39), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–9) and *Christmas Carol* (1843), Charles Kingsley's *Yeast* (1848) and William Thackeray's *A Shabby Genteel Story* (1840) and *Books of Snobs* (1846–7) are but a few of the works produced by English authors during this period. The years after Miller's article would see the publication of Gaskell's *North and South* (1855), Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850) and Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854).¹⁹ But what of the literature of Scotland? In his article Miller argued bravely that Scottish literature had provided the seminal literary representation of working people. 'It was perhaps in Scotland that the people could be first represented as they really were,' he writes, 'The vitalities of the national religion had already placed them on a high moral platform, and the national scheme of

¹⁸ Hugh Miller, 'Literature of the People' (*The Witness*, 27 October, 1849). I deal with Miller's essay in greater length in Chapter 10.

¹⁹ English literature certainly produced a wealth of social fiction in the 1830s and 40s. But to this must be added the significant caveat that all of these texts, (with the arguable exception of Dickens), were produced by middle-class writers. As P. J Keating has noted in his study, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1971), which deals with all the texts noted above, the working classes remained objectified in Victorian fiction and their appearance in the novel often functioned as a form of didacticism rather than any substantial effort on the part of the author to identify with the working-class character or to present the popular experience as imaginatively valuable in its own right. 'Most working-class novels are, in one way or another, propagandist,' Keating writes, 'They are usually written by authors who are not working class, for an audience which is not working class, and character and environment are presented so as to contain, implicitly or explicitly, a class judgement. The author may wish to show, for example that the working classes are basically no different from other people, or that they are, in a spiritual sense at least, more fortunate than other social groups; or that they are not at heart violent and so long as their just complaints are listened to sympathetically the middle and upper classes have nothing to fear from them. Or even more directly, that they need help, that they shouldn't drink, that more schools, hospitals, or workhouses, as the case may be – should be built for them. Put simply the most important single fact about the fictional working man is his class.' (p. 2).

education – a result of the national religion – had developed their faculties as thinking men.’²⁰ Miller takes an historical perspective of the representation of working people in literature suggesting that, ‘the people began to be exhibited, - first in Scotland by Allan Ramsay, who [...] looked intelligently around him, and, drawing his materials fresh from among the humble class, out of which he had arisen, gave life, and truth, and nature, to the dead blank form.’²¹ Miller goes on to argue that, following Ramsay, it was Robert Burns who decisively altered the fictional representation of the working man in British literature, influencing the works of Cowper, Henry Kirke White, Wordsworth and Walter Scott. Notably, the historic overview ends with Burns and Scott. It would seem that Miller simply did not have enough literary evidence from Scottish fiction after the mid 1830s to develop his argument. Several years later, in a *Witness* article in 1856 entitled ‘Edinburgh An Age Ago’, Miller reflected that Scotland’s literary standing had declined so far that ‘for the future, Edinburgh bids fair to take its place among the greater provincial towns of the empire; and it seems but natural to look upon her departing glory with a sigh, and to luxuriate in recollection over the times when she stood highest on the intellectual scale’.²² The article admits the influence of Henry Cockburn’s own nostalgic *Memorials of His Times*, published in the same year. Cockburn’s *Life of Francis Jeffrey*, published four years earlier, had been unequivocal in its statement of Scotland’s intellectual decline:

Many of the curious characters and habits of the receding age, the last purely Scotch age that Scotland was destined to see, still lingered among us [...] But

²⁰ Hugh Miller, ‘Literature of the People’ (*The Witness*, 27 October, 1849).

²¹ Hugh Miller, ‘Literature of the People’ (*The Witness*, 27 October, 1849). As a Tory, Jacobite poet, Ramsay believed in ‘high culture’ more than in popular or ‘low culture’ and he belongs to the tradition of late seventeenth-century aristocratic rationalism. However, in keeping with the bias of nineteenth-century criticism Miller viewed the so-called ‘vernacular poets’; Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns as essentially popular.

²² Hugh Miller, ‘Edinburgh An Age Ago’ (*The Witness*, 12 July, 1856).

now that London is at our door, how precarious is our hold of them, and how many we have lost!²³

Paul H. Scott, taking Cockburn's epithet of 'the last purely Scotch age' has argued that, 'the late 1830s mark one of the most obvious and drastic turning points in the literary history of Scotland.'²⁴ It was the decade that saw the death of Walter Scott in 1832, James Hogg in 1835 and John Galt in 1839. Arguably, the sympathetic, complex treatment of class and culture ended with the deaths of these three Scots writers. Scott was certainly a class-conscious, paternalistic Tory and as a public citizen fully concurred in the reaction against the revolutionary tendencies of the age and yet, as A. O. J. Cockshut has noted, 'if we take Scott's life and writings as a whole, there is an obvious paradox in his class attitudes'.²⁵ Establishmentarian in his leanings and aristocratic in his aspirations nevertheless his work demonstrates a genuine engagement with the voice of working people in characters such as Meg Merriles, Madge Wildfire, Jeanie Deans and Edie Ochiltree and invests genuine dignity in his depictions of the indigent, the disposed and the outcast. The realist, anti-Romance literature of James Hogg is repeatedly occupied with the lives of traditional working people and even in his most fantastical literature, acknowledges the economic realities which inform his fictional characters in works such as *Winter Evening Tales* (1820) *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1829), *The Three Perils of Man* (1822) and notably in the reductive, self-reflexive ending of *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of A Justified Sinner* (1824). Similarly John Galt's 'theoretical histories' evinced a desire to engage with the changing realities of Scottish society in novels which surveyed the microcosm of small lives in traditional Scots communities and

²³ Henry Cockburn, *Life of Lord Jeffrey, with a selection from his correspondence* (Edinburgh: A. and C. Black, 1872), pp. 150, 154.

²⁴ Paul H. Scot, 'The Last Purely Scotch Age' in *The History of Scottish Literature: Nineteenth Century* (see Douglas Gifford, above), pp.13 – 21 (p. 13).

²⁵ A. O. J. Cockshut, *The Achievement of Walter Scott* (London: Collins, 1969), p.38.

which, in works such as *The Annals of the Parish* (1821), *The Entail* (1822) and *The Radical* (1832) deal with the transitions of religion, law and politics in nineteenth-century Scotland. Finally, in novels such as Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818) with its vivid portrait of the Scottish Cameronian, Davie Deans and *Old Mortality* (1816) depicting the turmoil of the Covenanting wars and in Galt's *Ringan Gilhaize* (1823) and Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, these writers offered searching critique of a peculiarly Scots proletarian religiosity – an aspect of Scottish culture that was to be focal during the turbulent religious battles of the 1840s.

Several critics have identified the period after the deaths of Scott, Hogg and Galt as marking a period of retraction from serious social and cultural engagement in Scottish literature.²⁶ Arguably, Thomas Carlyle, whose *Signs of the Times* in 1829 brought the issue of political and social philosophy to the forefront of British literature, is one of the only Scottish Victorian writers that can be said to engage radically with the social conditions of the period. It is worth speculating whether, curiously, it was the influence of the Scots-born Carlyle, who removed to London in 1834, that sparked the social concern of English literature when Dickens became his committed disciple and Carlyle for a brief time became the social prophet of British letters.

²⁶ Kurt Wittig in *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1958) writes that 'the less said about the two generations after Scott the better [...] The tradition seemed really to have come to an end, and not with a bang, but with a whimper.' (pp. 253, 254). Roderick Watson's chronology of important publications in his *The Literature of Scotland* (London: Macmillan, 1984) is conspicuously thin from 1830 – 1880 (pp. 467 – 8). William Power in *Literature and Oatmeal: What Literature Has Meant to Scotland* (London: George Routledge, 1935) has said of the 1830s that 'Scots literature fell at once from a national to a provincial level', an assertion pilloried by David Craig in his *Scottish Literature and The Scottish People 1680 – 1830* which nevertheless agrees that Scotland's Victorian literature is evidence of a 'cultural impasse' in which 'the use of the native language became embarrassed, poetry ran shallow and dried up, the novel was provincial from the start, many of the most original minds emigrated. Hence the historian is left calling Victorian culture in Scotland "strangely rootless"' (p. 13). Paul H. Scott puts the case most plainly claiming that after Scott, Galt and Hogg 'there was a loss of cohesion and self-confidence, a decline which lasted about 50 years'. (Paul H. Scott, 'The Last Purely Scotch Age', *The History of Scottish Literature* vol. 4, p. 13).

When Hugh Miller arrived in Edinburgh in 1840, producing a series of outspoken, radically condemnatory social critiques in *The Witness* newspaper, he entered upon a literary scene polarised between the extremes of an established Romantic escapism and the neglected radical voices of vernacular poetry and fiction. Examining the literary culture of the 1830s and 40s, during which Miller wrote, we find the published writers of the period producing high romance, Scott-influenced adventures and historical romances, writers such as Thomas Campbell who produced Ossianic Romance poems such as 'Glenara' and 'Lord Ullin's Daughter' as well as the didactic 'Pleasure of Hope', Thomas Lauder, a contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine* who penned the historical romance *The Wolf of Badenoch* (1827), Michael Scott whose romance adventures *Tom Cringle's Lodge* and *The Cruise of the Midge* were published serially in *Blackwood's* in 1829 and 1834-5 and John Gibson Lockhart, who contributed to the *Blackwood's* 'Noctes Ambrosianae' which were so condescending in their treatment of Hogg and who himself penned the novel *Adam Blair* (1822) a tale of the temptations of a rural minister (probably influenced by Galt), *Reginald Dalton* (1824) and *Matthew Weld: The Story of a Lunatic* (1824) which is thought to have been heavily influenced by the work of James Hogg, of whom he was outwardly critical.²⁷ Finally there is the Blackwoodian classicist, William Aytoun, who produced the parodic *Book of Ballads* (1845) and the commercially successful 'cut and thrust' *Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers* (1849), William Maxwell, author of the Scott-influenced *The Romance of War* (1845) and Robert Ballantyne whose chivalric romance *The Young Fur Traders* was published in 1856. Few of these works have stood the test of time. The literature of the 1830s and 40s in Scotland is dominated by writing that is largely mimetic of the former 'great'

²⁷ See Douglas Gifford, *James Hogg* (Edinburgh: Ramsay Head Press, 1979), p.139.

Scottish writers, particularly the commercially successful Walter Scott, a literature that is broadly drawn rather than finely realised and one that is notably reticent on the subjects of social and cultural change. There is, of course, the writing of Susan Ferrier and Margaret Oliphant but Ferrier tended to focus her brilliant satire on domestic manners and Oliphant removed to England in 1838 and did not begin writing until 1844 in novels that tended to focus on the lives of middle-class women.

Much of the fiction of this time was published and distributed by the influential Tory *Blackwood's Magazine*. Despite its radicalism in promoting new genres and inspiring a generation of influential writers, there is little evidence in the *Blackwood's* writers of real creative engagement with the conditions of industrial deprivation that were changing the economic and political landscape of Scotland during the nineteenth century. John Wilson ('Christopher North') the editor of *Blackwood's* from 1817 until his death was himself author of a collection of lavish poetry, *Isle of Palms* (1812) which aped the styles of the English Romantics as well as a number of sentimental fictions such as *The Trials of Margaret Lindsay* (1823) and *The Foresters* (1824). D. M. Moir, who took up the editorship of *Blackwood's* after Wilson's death evinced the same predilection for the sentimental, socially didactic characterisation of the Scots rural working class in pre-kailyard novels such as *The Life of Mansie Waugh: Tailor in Dalkeith* (1828). The fiction of John Wilson, in particular, epitomises the tendency towards 'pleasing fantasies' of a picturesque, unchanging Scotland, in which the poor are pious and humble and the radicals are infidel. One cannot deny that Wilson and Moir's fiction, as culturally superficial and socially myopic as it was, did not perform an important social function in offering to the ruling classes (and literary consumers) selective visions which endorsed their own values. The triteness of Wilson's cultural and class depictions is not the result of pro-

Unionism or his staunch Toryism, however. Scott, Carlyle, Galt and Hogg all embraced these ideologies to varying degrees yet Scott's anti-heroes, John Galt's ironic narrators and Hogg's refusal to identify a single centre of truth reveal a desire in writers of integrity to explore the questions of culture and identity without seeking simplistic answers. The fiction of John Wilson and D.M. Moir was the prose equivalent of the *Whistle Binkie* anthologies: trivial, facile and ominously homiletic.

Despite the influential social critique and literary judiciousness of the *Edinburgh Review* under Francis Jeffrey's early editorship, there was little creative participation from the literary Whigs after 1830, far less the opportunity for the production of anything like the social novel. Jeffery, who tried unsuccessfully to realise his aspiration to become a writer, gave up the editorship of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1829 to turn to politics as did Francis Horner in 1810. Brougham's attentions were directed towards his career at the bar and Sidney Smith was to leave for London in 1803 where he turned his attentions to the Church.

A few socially engaged literary figures, however, remained. The lawyer and brilliant social commentator, Henry Cockburn, continued to offer subtle and insightful, albeit somewhat nostalgic, cultural and social observation in his *Life of Francis Jeffrey* (1852), *Memorials of His Times* (1856) and *Journal* (1874). Robert Chambers, was an active patron of working-class writing, supporting the careers of Allan Cunningham, William Thom and Hugh Miller among the many others that he published in *Chambers's Journal*. Similarly, under the editorship of William D. Latta, *The People's Journal* voiced a progressive liberalism, campaigning ceaselessly for the extension of the franchise and a range of social and economic reforms, particularly those affecting the working classes with whose interests the paper remained identified throughout its career. Of considerable influence too was David Pae, a radical

Evangelical, literary critic and editor of the *Dunfermline Press* and later the *People's Friend*. Pae published anonymously and so never achieved personal recognition but was, nevertheless, the most widely read author of fiction in Victorian Scotland.²⁸ His writing was heavily influenced by the social vision of Evangelicism and his fictions bear the mark of a social and political radicalism. His work also evinced the Evangelical desire for a creative submission to didactic ends and despite the often unfeasible plotting demonstrates, in novels such as *George Sandford; or, the Draper's Assistant* (1853), *Jessie Melville; or, the Double Sacrifice* (serialised during 1855 in the *North Briton*) and *Lucy the Factory Girl; or, the Secrets of the Tontine Close* (1860), a concern with the complexity of class relations, social limitations and prejudices. Despite the brave defence of Latto and Pae and of the vitality of a popular literary culture in the Scottish periodical press in William Donaldson's important contribution to nineteenth-century Scottish criticism, *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland: Language, Fiction and the Press* (1986), it remains true that these regional, vernacular and popular voices remained in the literary margins. Latto and Pae anticipate the most accomplished of these regional voices, William Alexander, whose *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk* (1871) was arguably one of the finest works of fiction to emerge from Victorian Scotland but remained critically neglected, most probably because of its regional publication and use of dense vernacular dialect.

Alongside these, only a few scattered voices of the radical Burnsian poetic tradition persisted in the literary scene of the later nineteenth century, poets such as the shoemaker, John Mitchell, the exciseman, William Finlayson who penned the 'Weaver's Lament', the embroiderer, John MacGregor author of 'The Tories Treat Us With Disdain', the weavers, James Yool (who wrote 'The Rise and Progress of

²⁸ William Donaldson, *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland: Language, Fiction and the Press* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986), p. 77.

Oppression') and Edward Polin who wrote 'In The Days When We Were Radical' and the baker, Alex MacGilvray who produced popular songs such as 'Of Whig and Tory We Can See'. But this is a fragmented body of work, a last remnant of the radical Burnsian tradition that suffered at the hands of a severe Victorian morality and the censorious attitude of the literary and political establishment.

Many critics have attempted to answer the question: what happened to Scottish literature after 1830? Paul H. Scott is unambiguous in his statement of Scotland's literary decline: 'By death or emigration [...] Scotland was emptied of major writers in the ten years before the Disruption of 1843, which was itself a turning point with far-reaching consequences.'²⁹ Scott explores Cockburn's famous assertion that by 1850 Scotland was losing its national distinctiveness and he examines, severally, the undermining effect of the decline in usage of the Scottish vernacular, the culturally centralising and economically mollifying effects of imperialism, the censoriousness of the sedition trials and the impact of the Highland Clearances. Yet it is the effect of the Disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843 to which he returns, finally, in conclusion. Qualifying Cockburn's memorable statement that the Disruption enacted, 'one of the rarest occurrences in moral history [...] the most honourable fact for Scotland that its whole history supplies'³⁰, Scott writes, 'it was remarkable but it was also disastrous' because the Kirk had, until that point acted as "the great unifying institution of the Scottish nation" and a bulwark of the national identity'³¹. Thus, Scott concludes:

²⁹ Paul H. Scott, 'The Last Purely Scotch Age', *The History of Scottish Literature* vol. 4, p. 14.

³⁰ Henry Cockburn, *Journal*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Edmonson and Douglas, 1874) II, pp. 30, 32.

³¹ Paul H. Scott, 'The Last Purely Scotch Age', *The History of Scottish Literature* vol. 4, p. 19.

With the Disruption, this great force for the cohesion of Scottish society was shattered in two [...] The Church of Scotland never regained its importance as the central institution in Scottish life which it lost in 1843. It was particularly incapacitated as a custodian of the Scottish identity in the period from the beginning of the conflict in 1833 until the schism began to heal towards the end of the century.

Remarkably enough, this decline in the influence of the Kirk coincides precisely with the period of literary decline. There is, of course, no simple, direct relationship of cause and effect between the two, but the decline of the Kirk affected all aspects of Scottish life. It meant that Scotland was deprived of an important line of defence and force of cohesion at a time when strong pressures were tending in any case to undermine national identity and self-confidence and to reduce the country to a national backwater.³²

Recognising the declining authority of the legal and educational institutions guaranteed autonomy under the Act of Union, Scott recognises that it was the General Assembly that formed the active political forum for transnational politics in Scotland after 1707 and that its division in 1843, at the climax of some ten years of internal dissention, reached far into the national Presbyterian psyche affecting not only the religious estate but a significant aspect of Scotland's political and cultural identity.

Scott is not the only critic to identify this event in Scotland's national religious life as impacting upon the literary culture of the nation as a whole. Douglas Gifford, (while attesting the neglected importance of writers such as Miller, Carlyle and William Alexander), concedes that 'from the death of Scott till Stevenson's fiction in the 1870s there was a period when Scots seemed to lose their sense of Scottish, as opposed to British (or English) national identity.'³³ Gifford's assessment of the period argues that the literature of the nineteenth century withdraws from active, contemporary political engagement and he too suggests the decisive impact of Disruption politics upon the literary culture of the nation:

³² Paul H. Scott, 'The Last Purely Scotch Age', *The History of Scottish Literature* vol. 4, pp. 19 -20

³³ Douglas Gifford, 'Out of the World and into Blawearie': The Politics of Scottish Fiction' in *The Polar Twins* eds. Edward J. Cowan and Douglas Gifford (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1999), pp. 284 – 303 (p. 289).

This de-politicising of Scotland owes much to the Disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843 [...] With the fatal and schizophrenic split of the Church in 1843 that remaining central arena for politics in Scotland was lost, and thereafter for a full hundred years it would appear that Scottish political life, as reflected in its fiction and culture generally, is somehow dissociated from the rest of Britain.³⁴

George Davie, writing in *The Democratic Intellect* in 1961 described ‘a failure of intellectual nerve amongst the Scots’ of the late nineteenth century in a thesis that is explicitly critical of the Disruption’s impact upon Scotland’s intellectual culture.³⁵ However, in a later essay in 1972 entitled ‘The Social Significance of the Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense’ Davie argued that in the period 1770 – 1850 there existed several Scots thinkers deeply engaged in the issues of industrialisation and social alienation. Of these, only Thomas Carlyle and, arguably, Francis Jeffrey might be said to have produced ‘creative’ writing. The others, David Hume, Adam Smith, Dugald Stewart, Thomas Brown, Sir William Hamilton, and James Ferrier, although all excellent writers, were philosophers of the Scottish school of common sense. In the essay, Davie acknowledges the damaging effects of the Disruption upon Scotland’s intellectual engagement with contemporary social issues³⁶ but suggests that

³⁴ Douglas Gifford, ‘Out of the World and into Blawearie’: The Politics of Scottish Fiction’ in *The Polar Twins* (see Gifford and Cowan, above), p. 289. In the same collection of essays Cairns Craig in ‘The Fratricidal Twins: Scottish Literature, Scottish History and the Construction of Scottish Culture’, rejects notions of a literary evasion of historical ‘reality’ in the literature of the nineteenth century, instead arguing for the literary validity of romantic mythologizing begun in the work of writers like Burns and Scott. Craig suggests that Scotland lacked not literary validity but political autonomy but that ‘nationalist politics was unnecessary because of Scotland’s role within the British empire’. While I agree with Craig’s assertion of the validity of the ‘Anglo-British’ culture of nineteenth-century literature (a thesis that recalls that of Robert Crawford’s *Devolving Scottish Literature*), Craig’s assertion of the value of such a literature is curiously lacking in actual textual examples, which might prove the point about a sustained literary vitality after 1830.

³⁵ George Davie, *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and her Universities in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1961) p. 337. Davie speaks of ‘the lurid “glow of the Disruption”’ which was ‘parching the land’ (p. 297). I discuss Miller’s role in the Disruption and the Disruption’s impact upon Scotland’s intellectual culture at greater length in Chapter 11.

³⁶ ‘We may concede to [John Stuart] Mill that, in the mid-century Disruption decades, there was some deflection and diversion of the intellectual drive, with Carlyle’s thought, in the quiet of Cheyne Row alone free to grapple with problems of socialism, while Hamilton and Ferrier, by their involvement in affairs at home, were forced to concentrate their intellectual energies on the struggle, over the fundamental principles of a Presbyterian polity, between the General Assembly as representing the spiritual powers of the Scottish people, on one hand and the Court of Sessions as embodying its civil

the received historical wisdom which advocates the social engagement of English experimental radicalism as contrasting with an introverted Scottish common sense philosophy fails to recognise the contrasting philosophical attitudes of the two traditions with regard to their understanding of the relationship between man's moral 'nature' and social and educational 'nurture'.³⁷ It is not that English radicalism was socially engaged and Scottish philosophy was not, Davie argues, but that the English philosophers, Locke and Mill, believed that correct social education could achieve a utopian society whilst Scottish philosophy believed that man's moral nature was *a priori* and given but that education ought to stimulate man's innate and latent good qualities. Christopher Harvie, writing on state of Scotland in the nineteenth century echoes Davie's concern with the status of education in Scotland's response to industrial secularisation. In his essay, 'Industry, Religion and the State of Scotland', Harvie reiterates previous assessments of literary decline:

The period between 1831 and 1881 [...] is also that of the great "black hole" in Scottish creative literature and social thought. Not only do Scott and Galt fall silent, but the massive social documentation associated with Sir John Sinclair's *Statistical Accounts* ends in the 1830s. Just at the point where they could have proved most useful in attempting to cope with the assault of industrialisation, competence and confidence appears to have deserted the Scots elite.³⁸

Once again, Harvie identifies the Disruption as the 'key to Scottish culture-politics' in the nineteenth century. Politically, the democratic ethos of Evangelicism, he argues,

Sense' (The Dow Lecture, delivered before the University of Dundee, 1972, Dundee? [n.p], 1973) p. 21.

³⁷ England's 'outward-looking experimentalism' in social affairs, Davie argues, derives from its Radical bias towards a specialised education in aiding 'science-based economic growth as the key to a material utopia' whereas the 'inward-looking nativism of Scotland' derives from the inherited Calvinist belief that 'education has only a limited role in forming man's moral nature'. Therefore, Davie's thesis proceeds, English Radicalism, in the tradition of Locke and John Stuart Mill, viewed the mind of man as a *tabula rasa*, capable of being moulded by external social factors while for Hume, Smith and Ferrier, education could only embellish but could not produce the moral tendencies of man.

³⁸ Christopher Harvie, 'Industry, Religion and the State of Scotland' in *The History of Scottish Literature: Nineteenth Century* (see Douglas Gifford, above), pp. 23 - 41 (p. 24).

served to ‘massage social tensions’ which might have led to out and out radical protest (although Chalmers’s Godly Commonwealth pleased neither the political elite, who saw their rights of patronage threatened, nor the radicals, who perceived its paternalistic ethos). Yet the General Assembly, which prior to 1843 ‘remained a religious forum in a pluralistic and increasingly secular society’ and which could, crucially, ‘have developed towards a form of Parliament’ was instead fatally fractured and latterly shrank to the function of purely ecclesiastic business. Harvie’s conclusion, like Davie’s, turns to the issue of Scottish education. Harvie suggests that rather than fictional creativity, Scottish literature turned to creative introspection:

In a period which sees civil society in turmoil, the creative writer is unlikely to aim for the ideal-type ‘truth’ of Scott or Galt, in which fictional examples validate an accepted notion of historical patterns. Instead he will tend to record personal experience, and then trim and adapt it, to produce an artificial equilibrium in an otherwise constantly-changing, baffling society. [...] Against this constriction of the fictional imagination, the ‘autobiography’, or the documentary *Bildungsroman*, seems both a way out of the chaos of Victorian Scotland, and a means of dramatising the role of education in the process of individuation and socialisation.’³⁹

Pointing to the ubiquitous biographies of Carlyle (as well as his numerous self-reflexive writings) and to the autobiographies of Miller, Ruskin, James Stuart, Thomas Davidson (founder of the Fabian Society) and John Muir amongst others, with their shared introspective concern with childhood and societal interest in education and contemporary affairs, Harvie’s thesis suggests that Victorian Scotland after 1843 moved from political autonomy to social self-scrutiny. Davie and Harvie’s theses would seem to agree that Scotland, at the very least, achieves a valuable social engagement through her philosophical and creative interest in the importance of education, an aspect of social thinking fundamental to British social policy and which

³⁹ Christopher Harvie, ‘Industry, Religion and the State of Scotland’, (see Gifford, above), pp. 36, 38.

notably, in the words of T. C Smout, 'forms an interesting and little-recognized case of the scotticization of England'.⁴⁰

Angus Calder's, in his essay on 'The Disruption in Fiction', an essay that supports Harvie's literary thesis, suggests that if Disruption was to undermine political autonomy it did little to inspire fictional creative engagement. That event which inspired Cockburn's awe has produced no imaginative reverberation, no mythos in the literature of Scotland in the way that Jacobitism or the religious turmoils of the Covenanting cause continue to produce endless fictional investigation. William Alexander's *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk* may be one of the few socially documentary novels produced in Scotland in its time, taking the subject of the Disruption as the focal point for its treatment of national and community politics but the novel also recognises that, 'the Disruption was no so very disruptive in Pyketillim'⁴¹ and had minimal impact on the ordinary experience of the Scottish people. Robin Jenkins, author of the historical novel, *The Awakening of George Darroch* (1985) which treats the subject of Disruption, has written that his researches led him to conclude that the Disruption 'had not really been a passionate spiritual crusade but merely a gentlemanly disagreement over theological matters'.⁴² Notably, the only novel dealing with the Disruption to be produced in the nineteenth century was produced by one Lydia - wife of Hugh - Miller. Her *Passages in the Life of an English Heiress or Recollections of Disruption Times in Scotland* (1847) is a structurally convoluted, tiresomely didactic work of fiction in which the central protagonist, Jane Hamilton Leigh, stripped of all the feminine or dramatic attributes of the conventional heroine, instead functions as the historic mouthpiece of the

⁴⁰ T. C Smout, *A Century of the Scottish people 1830 – 1950*, p. 210.

⁴¹ Angus Calder, 'The Disruption in Scottish Fiction' in *Scotland in the Age of the Disruption* eds., Stewart J. Brown and Michael Fry (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993) pp. 113 – 132 (p. 128).

⁴² Robin Jenkins, quoted in Angus Calder, p. 116.

Evangelical cause. Calder suggests that Evangelical prudishness about the propriety of the fictional venture (far less female authorship) might have inhibited Lydia Miller's potential creative gifts. As William Donaldson puts it:

To the extreme evangelical fiction was simply a lie and as such intrinsically immoral. Indeed, the form was regarded with varying degrees of distrust by religious activists of every kind. Fiction corrupted the reader. It inflamed the passions and made vice interesting.⁴³

Moreover, David Craig has noted the suspicion of the enlightened *literati* towards Calvinism, with its associations with credulity and fanaticism.⁴⁴ It appears then that Evangelicism, with its puritanical nervousness about fiction and its peculiarly bourgeois liberalism failed to ignite the literary imagination - even in an event as dramatic, and as fatally disruptive of the Scottish polity, as the Disruption of 1843.

Hugh Miller's project to mediate the polarised cultures of literature and labouring life ought to be considered in the light of contemporary nineteenth-century attitudes to rural experience and the working man. The voice of *The Witness*, from which all Miller's published writings emerged after 1840, articulated a concern with traditional Highland life and the experience of the working classes in industrial Scotland that is rarely expressed elsewhere in the literature of his own times. Writing in the period from the early 1830s until his death in 1856, Miller was also a figure central to the religious politics of the Disruption, an event so apparently traumatic to the intellectual culture in which he moved. One critic and contemporary, reflecting on Miller's ecclesiastic role, observed, some years after Miller's death, 'while it is hard to

⁴³ William Donaldson, 'Popular Literature: The Press, the People and the Vernacular Revival' in *The History of Scottish Literature: Nineteenth Century* (see Douglas Gifford, above), pp. 201 - 214 (p. 209).

⁴⁴ David Craig, *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People*, pp. 63 - 71, 166, 197.

imagine Hugh Miller without his theology and his ecclesiasticism, the reflection, however futile, is forced on one that had he been [...] less weighted in both respects, he would have developed into an even more striking and memorable figure than he appears in the ranks of Scottish scientists and men of letters.’⁴⁵ Yet while Miller was undoubtedly moved (and equally constrained) by the cause of the Free Church of Scotland, his intellectual character, like that of Thomas Chalmers, was moulded in the Moderate cast of thought. Just as the Scottish common sense philosophers were to advance the importance of education in the secular age, as Davie argues, so too did Miller subscribe to the Baconian empirical maxim ‘knowledge is power’ and he sought throughout his work to translate that belief into a literary articulation of the working-class voice. Miller’s essentially Moderate intellectual liberalism was to cost him dear. While fighting the cause of religious democracy under the leadership of Chalmers, he did not subscribe to the political bargaining of the Evangelicals after 1847 and, as a result, fell foul of the increasingly hegemonic powers of the Party. His increasing isolation mirrors the depression of secular intellectual culture in the latter half of Scotland’s turbulent nineteenth century.

⁴⁵ W. M. Mackenzie, *Hugh Miller: A Critical Study*, p. 246.

Chapter Two:

Literary Ambitions

The Chisel and The Pen: The Working Man as 'Man of Letters'

'Ever since I knew myself I have hovered on the verge of two distinct worlds – the one a gay creation of happy animated dreams, the other a dull scene of cold untoward realities.'
Hugh Miller¹

The literary success that Miller achieved was not gained by chance or fortuitous circumstances. By the time he arrived in Edinburgh in 1840 he had been working to achieve literary recognition for over ten years. Raised in the relative obscurity of a northern village and having worked for the best part of his life as a labouring mechanic, Miller was well aware of the cultural forces that obstructed his entry to the prestigious world of letters. And while Miller possessed a depth of intelligence and breadth of vision beyond most of his literary contemporaries, he did not seek to shine in the fashionable circles of periodical journalism. Nor could he, having experienced the harsh itinerant life of a labourer, sanction fashionable depictions of a sentimental Scotland. Instead Miller was seeking to express a voice which could speak to the Scotland that he knew, the Scotland of northern tradition, of historic community, of the politics of labour and church and country. Yet aware of the cultural politics of Scottish writing operating in his time, Miller sought to negotiate a literary voice which could both attract the endorsement of the social and literary elite whilst retaining validity in the eyes of the working population of Scotland to whom he spoke.

¹ Hugh Miller, letter to Miss Dunbar of Boath, LB12 (undated, but in reply to a letter dated 15 Jan. 1830).

In considering the public figure presented by Hugh Miller, it is necessary to recognise that Miller, in part, *created* the literary persona that he portrayed to the world. Indeed much of Miller's writing is concerned to fashion a picture of Hugh Miller as he wished to be seen. An approach which recognises Miller's own subjective agenda signals the possibilities of apocryphal self-fictionalisation (particularly in autobiography) but, more significantly, reveals the degree of self-consciousness in Miller's establishment of a self-defined persona. By such means, Miller was enabled to mediate the values of two worlds; the world of ordinary working people, mainly rural but increasingly urban, and the intellectual world which failed to represent it. From the traditional, working community in which he was raised, Miller grew into an ambitious young man, determined to succeed in the urbane world of nineteenth-century letters. An examination of his early life reveals the complexity of this transition and Miller's struggle to retain the autonomy by which he could represent his own experience whilst validating himself to the Edinburgh establishment.

Boyhood and Adolescence

*Over the sound a ship so slow would pass
That in the black hill's gloom it seemed to lie
The evening sound was smooth like sunken glass
And time seemed finished ere the ship passed by*

'Childhood' Edwin Muir

The story of Miller's life reveals a childhood overcast with loss and isolation and marked by the forces of death and superstition which characterise his early experience. Born in Cromarty in 1802, Hugh Miller was the son of a local shipmaster, from whom he took his name, and his young Highland wife, Harriet Wright. At the age of five years old, Miller lost his father to the sea and, in *My Schools and*

Schoolmasters he recalled how for weeks after his father's disappearance, he would stand at the Cromarty shoreline waiting for the two square top sails of his father's sloop to emerge on the horizon. Then, nine years later, in 1816, Hugh's two sisters died within days of one another from a malignant fever and Miller was left, an only child, in the care of his young mother and her two brothers.

Despite the absence of his father, the influence of both Miller's parental figures was to be extremely powerful in the shaping of his early sensibility. His mother, Harriet, was a highly-strung young woman, widowed at the age of just twenty-three. Steeped in the intuitive beliefs of the ominous and otherworldly which she inherited from her Highland forefathers, she was reputed to possess second sight and spoke of apparitions, visions and presentiments of the dead. Like the mother of James Hogg, Harriet was also the bearer of a wealth of traditional stories and supernatural legends which she passed on to her son and her influence on the young boy and his melancholy, superstitious cast of mind was clearly a powerful one. It was an influence, however, which his wife, Lydia, would later come to regard as Miller's most damaging. The difference between Miller's mother's and his wife's beliefs are, in fact, emblematic of a cultural transition in thought taking place throughout nineteenth-century Scotland. Lydia Miller was raised in the intellectual circles of Edinburgh's literary elite and was deeply critical of the 'superstitious' and 'heathen' beliefs of the primitive northern regions in which Harriet Miller had been raised.² In Lydia's letters to Bayne, she depicted Harriet as a pernicious and unstable influence upon the immature imagination of her son. Little wonder then that Bayne's biography describes Harriet as:

² In her introduction to the posthumous publication of Miller's collected prose works, *Tales And Sketches* (1863), Lydia is dismissive of their superstitious content and offers Miller's overwork and mental strain as a sort of apology for their pervasive interest in the supernatural.

not remarkable for her mental power or her strength of character [...] Her belief in fairies, witches, dreams, presentiments, ghosts, was unbounded, and she was restrained by no modern scruples from communicating either her fairy lore, or the faith with which she received it, to her son [...] Hugh Miller's mother was evidently one, who, in the jargon of the spirit-rapping fraternity, would be called a good medium. Interpreted into the language of persons who are neither knaves nor fools, this will mean that she was one who, having long permitted fantasy to be the sole regent of her mind, had fallen into the habit of mistaking the pale shapes and flitting shadows of its ghostly moonlight for the substantial forms of noon-day.³

Miller's own relationship with Harriet appears to have been a complex one. In the years after his father's death, Hugh grew into a restless and insubordinate boy, sorely testing the patience of his restive young mother. In Miller's autobiographical letter to Principal Baird there is a revealing passage relating to Miller's mother which was not to appear in his published autobiography. The letter, written when Miller was twenty-seven years old, recalls a painful incident in his early childhood:

I remember being wrung to the heart by overhearing my mother remark how different her condition would have been had it pleased Heaven to have taken her son from her, and left one of her daughters [...] It was bitter for me to think, and yet I could not think otherwise, that she had cause of sorrow both for those whom she had lost, and for him who survived.⁴

Although Miller is quick to dismiss the effect of these harsh words, a pervasive sense of guilt and insecurity certainly appears to characterise Miller's adolescent years and is a striking feature of his early, psychologically revealing poetry. Harriet's two brothers helped to raise the young Hugh and offered a kind of substitute for his absent father. Both uncles were pragmatic, self-contained men, raised, like their sister, in

³ Peter Bayne, I, 16-17. The unpublished manuscript of Hugh Miller's nephew, Hugh Miller Williamson, however, gives a very different picture. In it, Williamson claims that Lydia and Harriet Miller were bitter enemies and that Lydia's account is intended to portray Mrs Miller in the worst of lights, insinuating blame for Miller's later instability and the supernatural references within his suicide note.

⁴ Hugh Miller, letter to Principle George Baird (1829). Hugh Miller's letters to Principal Baird are reprinted in full from Hugh Miller's Letterbook 1829 -1835 in *Hugh Miller's Memoir* and are henceforth abbreviated as 'letter to Baird' (p.105).

devout religious observance and their judicious, steadfast Presbyterianism no doubt formed a first implicit counter to Hugh's early cynical atheism. The intense religiosity of the Wright family was mingled (particularly in the case of Miller's mother), with a love of pagan folklore and traditional storytelling. Uncle James passed to Hugh a great fund of traditional folklore, while it was Sandy Wright who first introduced Miller to the fascinations of natural history and inspired the boy with the heroic narratives of his time as a soldier during the French Revolution. In *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, Miller recorded how his childhood evenings were often spent gathered around the family fireplace, where his neighbours would re-tell old legends and his uncles recall the narratives of their heroic ancestors. In the short time Miller knew his grandparents, before their deaths in 1815 and 1816, Miller was able to absorb the influence of the quiet and devout grandmother, and received from his grandfather the 'unbroken narrative of the events of his past life'. 'He began with his earliest recollections,' Miller writes, 'described the battle of Culloden as he had witnessed it from the Hill of Cromarty and the appearance of Duke William and the royal army as seen during a subsequent visit to Inverness; ran over the events of his career- his marriage, his interviews with Donald Roy⁵ [...] And finally, his mind clearing as his end approached, he died in good hope'. (*S&S*, 117) As a child then, Miller was steeped in the stories of a folkloric Scottish culture and in the values of religious humility and traditional belief. When no visitors came to the house the young boy sat with his mother, who had taken employment sewing the shrouds for the dead, and learned from her the strange and ominous interpretation of worlds beyond the living.

Twelve years after his father's death, Harriet remarried. 'I had no particular objections to the match', Miller wrote to a friend some years later, 'but you may be

⁵A legendary ancestor of Miller's whom he describes as 'a celebrated Highland outlaw'.

certain that it gave me much disgust at the time'.⁶ The word 'disgust' is revealing, indicating a sense of violation. In the mind of the child his mother's re-marriage was perhaps an assault upon the sacred memory of his father. His image exists in Miller's work as a model of heroic strength and independence. In *My Schools and Schoolmasters* Miller delineates a paternal character that possesses many of the qualities that he himself sought to emulate, 'A singularly robust and active man, not above the middle size for his height never exceeded five feet eight inches – but broad shouldered, deep-chested, strong-limbed and so compact of bone and muscle, that there was not, among five hundred able-bodied seamen, a man who could lift so great a weight or grapple with him on equal terms'. (S&S, 3) Yet in his original autobiographical account to Baird in 1829, Miller admitted that he could 'barely remember'⁷ his father. The narrative that we have of Hugh Miller Senior's life, as recorded in *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, is one that we understand Miller to have stitched together from his uncles' recollections and in the book he concedes, 'Many of my other recollections of this manly sailor are equally fragmentary in their character, but there is a distinct bit of picture in them all, that strongly impressed the boyish fancy'. (S&S, 7) While Harriet Miller appears to have been an emotionally volatile maternal figure and Hugh, in childhood, was raised in a home stifled by grief and spiritual intensity, Miller's father existed 'in absence' and as such presented a vacuum for the self-projection of the child. Later in life Miller would utilise this model as an available template for his own projected identity.⁸

⁶ Hugh Miller, letter to William Ross, quoted in Bayne, I, 53 (Autumn, 1819).

⁷ Hugh Miller, 'letter to Baird,' p. 89.

⁸ Miller utilised the heroic image of his father as a model for his own adult persona: independent, just, and physically powerful. Both Bayne's account, and the recollections by J.R Robertson recorded within it, as well as David Masson's record, describe Miller's pleasure in physical competitions by which he demonstrated his physical superiority. Yet rather than displaying gender insecurity, as Shortland has proposed, it is arguable that Miller was compensating for a feeling of intellectual inferiority amongst literary men and he was fond of playing off his physical prowess against the intellectuals of the day.

Miller's father, as he presents him, is thus the narrative of a child seeking to fill in the gaps of his absent father's life with the heroic tale of his memory. In this early emotional disposition towards the imaginary a propensity towards the fusion of the concrete and the ideal is perceivable. Add to this, the influence of Miller's mother and her intuitive sense of the connection between the worlds of living and the dead, and the atmosphere of Miller's childhood appears as one permeated by an intimate sense of the transient and ethereal. Miller himself recalled how, as a boy, he had witnessed apparitions appear to him; 'I have a distinct recollection, too - but it belongs to a later period - of seeing my ancestor, old John Feddes the buccaneer, though he must have been dead at the time considerably more than half a century'. (S&S, 19) Again, at the time of his father's death:

I saw at the open door, within less than a yard of my breast, as plainly as ever I saw anything, a dissevered hand and arm stretched towards me. Hand and arm were apparently those of a female: they bore a living and sodden appearance; and directly fronting me, where the body ought to have been, there was only blank, transparent space, through which I could see the dim forms of objects beyond. (S&S, 23)

We see too, in his childhood accounts, the development of a morbid fascination and a desire to penetrate the emotion of fear by immersing himself in the ethereal world of the deceased and spectral which had haunted him since his early youth. In his autobiography, he recalls that in his youth he:

was fond of lingering in the caves until long after nightfall, especially in those seasons when the moon at full, or but a few days in her wane, rose out of the sea as the evening wore on, to light up the wild precipices of that solitary shore [...] Finlay was almost the only one of my band who dared to encounter with me the terrors of the darkness. (S&S, 126)

Time and time again he would test his nerve against the eerie blackness of the cliffs at night. In both of his autobiographical accounts he narrates at length the story of the Doocot cave where he and a friend were trapped and spent a terrifying night, and where Miller was haunted by visions of a dead seaman who had perished there weeks before. This consciousness of the world beyond the living was one that was to remain with him throughout his life. The spectre of the supernatural, which almost all of Miller's critics have identified, was to remain in perpetual tension in Miller's own thinking. In his struggle to marry the values of past and present Scotland, Miller would constantly return to the forces of traditional thought in which he had been raised. Yet ever conscious of the increasing disapproval of modern rational philosophy and the evidence of scientific theory, ultimately Miller remains ambivalent.

During the turbulent years of Miller's early youth, his uncles had something of a stabilising effect, encouraging his natural intelligence and instilling in him a predilection towards rational solutions, which tempered his fascination with the morbid and unearthly. James and Alexander Wright were the models of what Miller would later describe as 'the better class of mechanic'. They were independent, self-educated working men, and together they steered Miller's restless curiosity towards the pursuit of learning. The story of Miller's self-education is perhaps the best known aspect of his life. His early reading was random and piecemeal, dictated by what was available. At the age of six years, Miller began by reading Homer's *Odyssey* and *The Iliad*, developing a taste for the fantastical and heroic, which led him on to the adventures of Swift, Addison, Drake and Cooke. In his autobiography he records how at an early age he discovered that 'the art of reading is the art of finding stories in books'. (S&S, 27) It was an intuitive feeling for the imaginative world that allowed

Miller to penetrate beneath the words to the human situations beneath them. The absence of immediate role models meant that Miller's emotional identification with literature was immediate and is perhaps one explanation for his later adoration of certain literary figures.⁹

Yet as Miller grew up his restless nature and curiosity became increasingly unruly and defiant. Impatient with the constraints of his parish schooling, Miller played truant most of his school days, preferring to spend his time wondering the Cromarty shoreline, foraging amongst the stones for old fossils and building fortresses, studied from old military textbooks, from the sand. He set himself against any figure of authority maintaining an almost violent protection of his independence. In school, he lashed out against the class bully by driving a clasp knife into the boy's knee, he argued with his school teachers and reacted against his uncles who failed in their frustrated attempts to discipline him. Instead Miller indulged his own interests, sometimes leading a band of local boys in various escapades away from the classroom, sometimes entertaining his fellow pupils with the adventure narratives and stories of the great leaders of Scotland's past that he had gleaned from his reading. By his fourteenth year, Miller had read, independently, the works of Homer, Bunyan, Milton, and Goldsmith, the Old and New Testaments, the philosophical treatises of Flavel and Hutchinson, the voyaging narratives of Addison, Drake and Cook, the English metaphysicians, Goethe, Rousseau, Wordsworth, Keats, Carlyle, and the early Scots of Barbour's *The Brus*, and Harry's *The Wallace* as well as Dunbar, Fergusson and Burns. Yet it was at this age when Miller's brief experience of formal schooling came to an abrupt end. Humiliated by the parish schoolmaster over the 'proper'

⁹ I discuss Miller's relationship to literary icons at length in Chapter 4.

pronunciation of a word, he came to blows with the teacher and walked, finally, out of school - he never again returned to formal education.

Perhaps one of the greatest curiosities of Miller's life is his choice not to follow an academic career. The information that we have about Miller's decision is scant, even as the ostensible subject of his autobiography, *My Schools and Schoolmasters or The Story of My Education*. Certainly his attitude to his early schooling would have failed to inspire an enthusiasm for further education but more likely, it was Miller's defiant attitude of independence which contributed to his decision. In *My Schools and Schoolmasters* he describes how he rejected the offer of being paid through University by his uncles for fear that it would bind him to familial expectations. Instead he was seduced by the seemingly unfettered lifestyle of his Highland cousin, George Munro, who, Miller observed, was able to indulge his artistic interests at leisure during the long winters in which the stonemason rests from the working season. And so at the age of eighteen Miller chose, against all expectations, to enter into the life of a journeyman mason. Yet Miller's choice to undertake a labouring profession obscures the intensity of his ambition to eventually make his literary voice heard. Having rejected the laborious classical education of parish schooling, his imaginative nature sought satiation in an independent pursuit of learning and it was during these operative years that Miller produced the works of poetry, literature and scientific analyses that would mark his entry into the public world of letters.

Literary Ambitions

'Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire; you will what you imagine, and at last you create what you will.'
George Bernard Shaw

In his choice to pursue a labouring life, Miller had no intentions of retreating from his artistic ambition. The choice to work as a mason had been made specifically for its flexibility in providing both an independent income and the opportunity to compose writings during the quiet seasons. His private letters, written during his years as an operative mason, reveal a deeply ambitious man, determined eventually to enter into the world of letters and make his voice heard. In 1828 he wrote to his friend and confidante, William Ross:

Rousseau was certainly in the right when he said that the art of writing well was of all others the most difficult to acquire. I have been wishing, ay, and striving too hard as my indolent, volatile nature suffered, for these three years past to acquire this art, and all I have yet attained is an ability of detecting my mistakes and of seeing how incorrect my modes of expression are.¹⁰

In these early years Miller struggled to perfect his as yet immature literary talents. Yet despite his anxiety about his abilities, he retained a deep-seated conviction that he was intended for greater things than the life of a working mason. William Ross represented to Miller more than just a sympathetic friend; Ross himself was a talented, but neglected artist struggling for recognition. Yet Ross died a young man and never gained the credibility Miller believed he deserved. The figure of this poverty-stricken, neglected painter is recurrent in Miller's work as though Miller wished to bear testimony to a neglected life, striving to rescue his friend's name for posterity. And there is, in his own words, the sense that Miller himself feared an

¹⁰ Hugh Miller, letter to William Ross, quoted in Bayne, I, 229 (May 1828).

obscure death most of all. Miller later vowed of Ross, 'I cannot forget him, and if I myself be ever known to the world the world shall know why.'¹¹ From his youth Miller was striving to achieve the kind of recognition that Ross never gained and part of his intention in utilising that recognition would be to rectify the neglect of marginalised artists.

In planning his artistic career, Miller would leave nothing to chance. In the spring of 1828, aged twenty-six, Miller drew up a three-part document detailing his specific artistic, literary and scientific aims. In it, he defined the titles and contents of projects to be written:

1. I intend writing a work, humorous and descriptive, to be entitled "Four Years in the Life of a Journeyman Mason".
2. I intend writing a history of my varying thoughts of men and manners, right and wrong, philosophy and religion, from my twelfth to my twenty-sixth year.
3. I intend writing a description of the town and parish of Cromarty, its traditional history and character of its inhabitants.¹²

[For a complete transcription, see Appendix A]

Such a project signifies the intensity of Miller's ambitions and his single-minded intention to achieve them. Indeed, in these pages lie the germination of a good deal of what Miller actually achieved in his literary career. During the working season, Miller worked out his literary and philosophical ideas whenever the opportunity arose. Even his personal correspondence represented an act of composition and often he worked out his philosophical ideas and observations into highly crafted narratives within them. Miller transcribed each of these letters and kept them, along with his poetry, stories and ideas in a private manuscript to which he would later return when he came

¹¹ Hugh Miller, letter to Miss Dunbar of Boath, LB86 (29 March 1834).

¹² Hugh Miller's 1828 project entitled, 'Things I intend doing', recorded in Bayne, I, 230-233. See Appendix A.

to write so that much of the substance of his letters actually appears in his published writing. In a sense, Miller was always practising to become a writer.

The Anxiety of the Autodidact

"I am a great egoist, but how can I help it?" Hugh Miller¹³

Miller's longing for recognition was often expressed in a defiant conviction of his own self-worth and such was the intensity of his desire for external approbation that he could sometimes appear narcissistic and self-congratulatory. In his autobiographical letter written to George Baird, then Principal of Edinburgh Academy, in 1829, Miller included a lengthy summary of his private musings, which appear somewhat indulgent and self-involved. 'I discovered that I could be amused by the exercise of the mental faculties alone', he records, and continuing to present several pages of abstract thought he concludes:

I congratulate myself on the discovery. The scene is immediately charged by self-love; and I enquire of myself whether I be possessed of one of the capacious minds to which the abtrusest [sic] studies appear matters of mere common sense that can be discussed almost without effort. The decision is, of course favourable, but I suspect its justice.¹⁴

The letter to Baird was to be Miller's first attempt at fashioning a literary persona and the inclusion of such self-conscious observations are clearly intended to support an image of Miller as a gifted, but under-privileged, artist. In nothing was Miller more characteristic of the autodidact than in his combination of egotistical self-projection

¹³ Hugh Miller, letter to Harriet Miller, quoted in Bayne, I, 116 (July 1823).

¹⁴ Hugh Miller, 'letter to Baird', p.140.

and penitent self-doubt.¹⁵ In a revealing account by J.R. Robertson, with whom Miller passed the summer of 1834, Robertson observed:

I had always acquiesced in the opinion that he was a wonderful person, and dwelt so much on this that the enquiry as to his humility was generally forgotten. Had I been pressed on that point, I should have answered, No. He had great ability and he knew it, and was determined that the world should one day know and acknowledge it.¹⁶

Yet Miller also suffered a great deal of guilt about his literary ambition. In correspondence with his close friend, John Swanson, who at this time was trying to encourage a religious conversion from Miller, then a self-confessed atheist, Miller eventually capitulated and in a confessional essay in 1825 wrote:

At times I have tried to pray [...] I have striven to humble my proud spirit by reflecting on my foolishness, my misery, and guilt [...] but I am an unsteady and wavering creature, nursing in my foolishness vain hopes, blinded by vain affections, in short, one who though he may have his moments of conviction and contrition, is altogether enamoured of the things of this world and a contemner [sic] of the cross.¹⁷

Miller's aspirations for a literary career were confounded by his painful awareness of his low station in life and consciousness that such 'vain hopes' flouted the Christian maxims of forbearance and humble acceptance. As Miller moved towards religious conversion the spirit of Evangelical penitence became ever stronger¹⁸ and his personal

¹⁵ A full consideration of the literary anxiety manifest in the experience of the autodidactic writer is given in Appendix C: 'The Anxiety of the Autodidact'. I have chosen to consider those writers that Miller himself identified as comprising a 'school' of humble-born and self-taught writers. In this way, I hope to contextualise Miller's individual literary anxieties and to provide some evidence supporting the speculation that such anxiety is a feature of the self-taught writer.

¹⁶ 'Robertson's Recollections' in Bayne, I, 384.

¹⁷ Hugh Miller, letter to John Swanson, LB SI (December 1825).

¹⁸ With the same tone of contrition he writes to William Ross in January of 1827 'I have at times, I trust, by His help, cleared my heart of its viler affections, and repressed its evil desires [...] But alas! At other times I have willingly opened the floodgates of passion, I have courted rather than resisted temptation [...] Ah William, there can be no greater deceiver than self-love – no flatterer more dangerous – for there is none we suspect less.' (LB SI).

correspondence is full of self-deprecating references to his own vanity.¹⁹ In a letter home Miller observed that, 'I am now going to turn to gossip and give you some stories of myself. I am a great egotist, but how can I help it? I have no second hand narratives to relate, and of what I myself see, I must tell you of what I myself think.'²⁰ Indeed it is significant that one of Miller's projects, documented in the literary plan of 1828 was a collection of miscellaneous essays entitled 'The Egotist' the ostensible subject of which was to be Hugh Miller himself.

Yet beneath his defensive assertions of self-worth lay a profound insecurity. While Miller aspired to recognition he lacked confidence in his validity as a writer. His position as a humble working mason meant that his passage into literary circles could hardly be easy. Rather, it would require the literary endorsement of the established *literati* and Miller himself was only too aware of the need for extrinsic artistic validation in order to realise his ambitions in the literary world. Secondly, Miller's own insecurity about his social standing meant that when he came to offer himself as no less than 'a man of letters' he was in constant need of praise and approval. Yet this jarred with his adamant need for independence. In a sense the need for one derived from the other, Miller could not suffer his fragile pride being compromised by being beholden to any man – or indeed any circle of men. The maintenance of autonomy allowed Miller to claim his attainments as his own (something which his autobiography *My Schools and Schoolmasters* is at pains to

¹⁹ 'But you will deem me dull and an egotist' (letter to Lydia, LB89 (1834); 'Remember, however, that species of conceit which I display on the present occasion is not quite that of the past. It plumes itself on an ability to produce, not upon anything produced already [...] You smile at my conceit – well I have done so already'. (letter to Miss Dunbar of Boath, LB12 (1830); 'But has not vanity something to do in calling in such a testimony – nothing more likely'. (letter to Dr Waldie LB159 (1835); 'Never was my little remnant of modesty in such danger as it has been exposed to by the critical remark of Baron Hume'. (letter to Mrs Grant of Laggan, quoted in Bayne, I, 394 (1834).

²⁰ Hugh Miller, letter to Harriet Miller quoted in Bayne, I, 116 (July 1823).

express) but, more importantly, meant he retained ultimate control over his own literary voice.

By 1829, aged twenty-seven years, Miller had secured the publication of his first collection of poems, funded by the support of Robert Carruthers, then Editor of the *Inverness Courier*. Carruthers later provided a vehicle for Miller's prose voice in a series of observational essays entitled *Letters on the Herring Fishery in the Moray Firth* (1829), which appeared weekly in his newspaper. Having aroused the interest of several literary figures, Miller was approached by Principal George Baird, who, interested in Miller's academic attainments despite a partial education, asked Miller to write a short article explaining his literary abilities and offered to patronise the young man as a writer in the capital. Miller rejected Baird's offer of patronage, instead focusing on the opportunity to utilise the article to Baird as an extended essay of self-delineation which mark the beginnings of a self-defined literary persona. The rejection of Baird's offer, however, given the intensity of Miller's literary ambition is curious. But a move to the capital would have entailed dependency upon Baird's patronage and Miller, who had already refused help from his uncles, feared any move which would compromise his sense of personal and creative independence. Miller's actions at this early stage in his career betray an almost painful self-consciousness – his rejection of various forms of patronage mingles gruff dismissal with humble attestations of inadequacy. On numerous occasions he fails to present himself to eminent figures for fear of appearing beholden to their generosity. In a letter to Miss Dunbar of Boath, a literary lady who had befriended Miller and praised his name to the influential Mrs Grant of Laggan, Miller was forced to admit that he felt incapable of presenting himself:

I had to quit [Edinburgh ...] (a circumstance I shall ever regret) without seeing Mrs Grant of Laggan. With all my haste, however, I might have found time enough for the purpose could I have but found the courage, but the fear of being deemed obtrusive held me back.²¹

In his written response to Baird's invitation to Edinburgh, Miller gave literary inadequacy as one of the primary reasons for refusing entrance to the literary circles of the capital. 'But perhaps I am more ambitious now than I was five years ago', he writes, 'Perhaps I would not be satisfied with merely seeing such men, and I am aware that I have not yet done anything which entitles me to the notice of the eminent'.²² Similarly, in a letter written to Isaac Forsyth of Elgin, one of Miller's local literary patrons, Miller explained his unwillingness to court the attention of established writers:

I am acquainted with Mr Pringle²³ as a poet – and an admirable poet he is [...] I shall not venture, however, on addressing him by letter. The friendship of such a man, however valuable, and however much an honour, would scarcely afford me the pleasure which ought to be derived from it unless I were conscious I had done something to deserve it, and at present I have no such consciousness. I am as yet only a little fellow, and with all the jealousy of a little fellow I shall conceal my insignificance, not by stalking on stilts into the company of the gigantic, but by immuring myself in my solitude, from the loopholes of which I shall peep at them as I best may, solicitous both to see and to avoid being seen.²⁴

There appears to be an element of defensive pride in Miller's refusal to court high-standing figures. And in his private life he betrayed a similar insecurity. In a revealing passage of his autobiography Miller recalled how, during his time as a labourer in

²¹ Hugh Miller, letter to Miss Dunbar of Boath, LB145 (June 1835).

²² Hugh Miller, letter to Principal Baird (rejecting his offer of patronage in the capital) LB5 (9 December 1829).

²³ Thomas Pringle (1789 – 1834) A Romantic poet and editor of the *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine* and briefly of *Blackwood's*, Pringle emigrated to South Africa in 1820 where he produced his most popular work, *African Sketches, Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* (1834).

²⁴ Hugh Miller, letter to Isaac Forsyth of Elgin, LB28 (undated but in reply to a letter of June 1820).

Edinburgh, he avoided visiting a wealthy cousin for fear of ‘imposing’ himself upon a social superior:

Cousin William, like Uncle James, had fully expected that I was to make my way in life in some one of the learned professions, and his position [...] was considerably in advance of mine, I kept aloof from him, in the character of a poor relation, who was quite as proud as he was poor, and in the belief that his new friends, of whom, I understood, he had now well-nigh as many as before, would hold that the cousinship of a mere working man did him little credit. (S&S, 339)

Miller was not comfortable among those whom he perceived as his social superiors, and a large part of his determination to succeed appears to have been driven by a desire to meet with those whom he admired, as their equal. Yet Miller was never able to cast off the awareness that, even when he arrived in Edinburgh in 1840 as Editor of *The Witness* newspaper, he did so as the ‘Cromarty stonemason’ of his working years and he maintained that role with a mixture of reticence and defiance. Miller himself attributed his social reserve to ‘diffidence.’²⁵ In a letter to Swanson he complained of his discomfort in society. ‘In that proper assurance which is opposed to bashfulness’, he writes, ‘there is scarce a young girl in the country who is not my superior’. And quoting one of Shenstone’s poems, which describes the predicament of the bashful man in company, Miller writes self-deprecatingly, ‘were it not that he is represented as possessed of talent and virtue, I would lay my hand on the page, and say, this is a

²⁵ In a letter to Miss Dunbar of Boath in 1833 Miller wrote, ‘diffidence tells me that I am a poor mechanic, regarded with a kind perhaps, but still a compassionate feeling, and if I but take the slightest commonest liberty of social intercourse it is at the peril of being deemed forward and obtrusive. Well, I receive an invitation and accept of it. I come in contact with persons whom I like very much; the better feelings are awakened within me; the intellectual machine is yet working; and I communicate my ideas as they arise. “You chattering blockhead,” says diffidence, the moment I return home, “what right pray had you to engross so much of the conversation tonight? You are a pretty fellow to be sure to set up for a Sir Oracle! – Well you had better take care next time.” Next time comes and I am exceedingly taciturn. “Pray, Mr Block,” says diffidence, the instant she catches me alone, “what fiend tempted you to go and eat the Lady’s bread and butter tonight, when you had determined prepense not to tender her so much as a single idea in return? A handsome piece of furniture truly to be stuck up at the side of a tea table!”’ (LB56).

portrait of H_ M_.'²⁶ There is a reserve in Miller's public manner that does appear to belie genuine social shyness. David Masson's account describes him as 'almost blockishly silent' when in 'dinner-table society' and even in familiar company giving an impression of 'abnormal impenetrability'.²⁷ Dr McCosh similarly recalled that 'I have observed that in large promiscuous companies he was apt to feel awkward and restrained, and to retire into himself, and sit silent.'²⁸ Yet the observations made by Miller's contemporaries indicate other reasons for his reticence. A recollection by Marion Wood, a literary lady of the Millers' company, notes, 'there is no doubt he was somewhat shy and proud and jealous of his independence and some found him inaccessible from this cause'²⁹ while McCosh states that Miller was 'unwilling to seem to be seeking the favour of any man',³⁰ which would explain his reluctance in approaching literary figures – or even in accepting their benefaction, as with Principal Baird. Rather than just shyness, it was Miller's pride, mingled with anxiety about his social and literary standing, which kept him silent.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that to Miller, the hierarchical class structure of nineteenth-century Scotland was considerably more apparent, viewed as it was in his case from the perspective of the lower classes who felt the burden of its constrictions. Whilst celebrated locally as a man of unusual intelligence, Miller was aware that it was with the understanding that his intellectual gifts were considered unusual given his low station in life. And later when Miller came to court Lydia Fraser, the circumstances of his social standing were to become painfully apparent. An intelligent young lady of the upper-middle classes, raised and educated in Edinburgh society, Lydia had retired to Cromarty in order to take care of her elderly

²⁶ Hugh Miller, letter to Swanson quoted in Bayne, I, 187 (2 September 1830).

²⁷ David Masson, *Memories of Two Cities*, p. 150.

²⁸ Dr McCosh 'Recollections' recorded in Bayne, II, 452.

²⁹ 'Recollections of a Lady' recorded in Bayne, II, 345.

³⁰ Dr McCosh 'Recollections' recorded in Bayne, II, 451.

mother. Mrs Fraser, however, considered Miller a poor match for her daughter and the couple was forced to agree that Hugh must attempt to raise himself in life in order to marry. Miller pursued the aim diligently, abandoning masonry for the drudgery of a clerical bank job in Leith. Ultimately, however, the resolution provided a credible motivation for Miller to pursue his long-held ambition to enter into a literary career. The climate of literary politics in the capital did little to absolve Miller's social insecurity, however. In Edinburgh, a battle of cultural and class politics was being waged between the Whig *Edinburgh Review* and John Wilson's Tory *Blackwood's Magazine* and the weapons of opposition ranged from subtle manipulation to outright attack. It was through John Wilson's '*Noctes Ambrosiane*' that James Hogg was cartooned as the bucolic and comic 'Ettrick Shepherd.' Wilson also acted as a literary patron to the mason poet Allan Cunningham, while in his articles he trivialised the production of popular literature in Scotland with tags such as the 'Bairns O' Bank and Brae' or 'The Children O' the Soil.'³¹ The vitriolic attacks against Leigh Hunt and the so-called 'Cockney school' implied a rejection of literature born from underprivileged society or articulated by working writers. In fact, it had been Leigh Hunt who had been one of the first critics to praise Miller, describing him, in 1835, as 'a remarkable man, who will infallibly be well known' and comparing him favourably with the former stonemason 'Honest Allan Cunningham', editor of *The Works of Robert Burns* (1834) and himself a poet and author of *Traditionary Tales of the Peasantry* (1822) and *Songs of Scotland* (1825).³² Given Hunt's own position as a provocative and radical writer, defending the rights of the people against the abuses of hegemonic power, Hunt's endorsement attached Miller firmly to the growing circle of critical and outspoken writers emerging in British literature. Miller himself had long

³¹ 'Noctes Ambrosiane,' *Blackwoods Magazine*, October, 1826.

³² Leigh Hunt, quoted by Hugh Miller in a letter to Lydia Miller, LB150 (July 1835).

known that his own political and social values would not find favour with the reigning figures of the literary scene. In 1833, as he embarked on his first literary ventures, he had written in a letter to his wife:

Sir Thomas has sent me my manuscript, accompanied by a brief and exceedingly hurried note from Professor Wilson, in which he promises to write him a letter on the subject in a few days. I must say, I expect very little from the Professor. I question whether he has read my first chapter. Besides our style and manner of thinking are so very unlike, that I do not well see how he can approve of my writings without passing a sort of tacit censure on his own. He is one of the most diffuse writers of the day; I am concise. His thoughts are detached; mine are consecutive. His descriptions, gorgeous with colour and exquisite in form, delight only the sight; mine, though less splendid, appeal to the sentiments. His narratives are hung over with splendid draperies; mine are naked. He rarely reasons on the nature of man; I often. He is a Tory. I a Whig. What can I expect from such a critic?³³

Wilson never did respond to Miller's work. Critically, Miller would receive only peripheral (if enthusiastic) praise. But Miller was right in discerning that his own idiom and his ideologies were too far from the centre to be endorsed by the establishment. His comment reveals not only an astute assessment of the politics which governed literary criticism at that time but also his disparagement of the dominant strands in nineteenth-century Scottish writing. In the mid-1830s Wilson was in his hey-day and his 'diffuse', 'detached' and 'gorgeous' prose was hugely commercially successful. Miller's own writing, which depicted the decaying state of the Highlands and argued for the maintenance of local tradition, religious freedom of expression, negro emancipation, the extension of the franchise and the need for literature to express the voice of the working people upheld a socially radical perspective, equalled only by the early Carlyle. Miller was himself, deeply critical of the intellectual climate of the time. In a passing comment, he wrote to Lydia; 'Even in

³³ Hugh Miller, letter to Lydia Miller, LB101 (1833).

the present age when every college student arrogates himself to the praise of superior ability, men of real talent are very few.’³⁴ And in his autobiography he recalls his frustration at being unrecognised amongst a world of petty *litterateurs*; ‘I saw men whom I regarded as not my literary superiors in natural talent’, he writes, ‘and even not possessed of greater command of the pen, occupying respectable places in the periodical literature of the day [...] and deriving from their labours of from one to three hundred pounds per annum’. (S&S, 481) Miller disliked the pretension and partisanship so prevalent in the capital and he condemned the political and sectarian animosities of the age and the tendency towards literary snobbery. In Edinburgh he maintained his position of independence, promoting his identification with the popular voice and avoiding the partisanship of Party or politics. Such a stance, however, provoked hostility and distrust among the prominent figures of Edinburgh’s religious and literary circles. In fact, Miller was by in large dismissed by the *literati*. Bayne attributes their neglect to their unwillingness to become entangled in the disputations of the Church and suggests that they ‘would have told Miller that, in becoming the fighting man of the non-intrusionists, he was throwing himself away’.³⁵ It is equally possible that that same snobbery that barred Burns and Hogg from literary equality with the *literati* saw Miller closed off from the eminent circles of the day. In his ‘Recollections’, Dr McCosh recalled the grudging respect proffered in the capital, observing: ‘The literary men in our Universities [...] did not like to be thought readers of the stone mason’s paper but were glad when they could get furtive glances at it, and were obliged to recognise its literary superiority.’³⁶ In response, Miller’s self-protective pride spurred him into becoming one of Edinburgh’s most prolific writers. He worked incessantly, often preparing the majority of articles for *The*

³⁴ Hugh Miller, letter to Lydia Miller quoted in Bayne, II, 93 (undated).

³⁵ Peter Bayne, II, 221.

³⁶ Dr McCosh ‘Recollections’ quoted in Bayne, II, 449.

Witness himself. He was vigilant of critical responses to his work, delighted by praise and enraged by criticism.³⁷ Of his tendency to over-work, Bayne has observed that the motive of praise was one of Miller's primary driving forces. 'In nothing was his temperament more characteristically the temperament of a man of genius – than in his susceptibility to the influence of praise', he notes, 'It was once truly said of him that "he was like a horse which can be urged by the voice of encouragement beyond the power of living exertion."'”³⁸ It was as if Miller believed he could outrun the prejudice of his critics by dint of sheer hard work. Even in Evangelical circles, as we shall see, Miller was regarded with dubiety. His refusal to toe the Evangelical Party line erupted when the Reverend Candlish insisted that Miller's *Witness* articles focus less on international and social affairs and concentrate more on the proceedings of the Church. As it stood, he felt that the newspaper vocalised the concerns of Hugh Miller more than the ecclesiastic concerns of the Evangelical Party and in 1847 Candlish proposed that Miller be removed as editor of *The Witness*. In response, Miller issued a letter to the leaders of the Evangelical Party insisting that his loyalty remained with 'the people of the Free Church of Scotland [...] to which I belong and which I represent'.³⁹

Hugh Miller brought to the literary capital the voice of a distinctive and older inheritance. His values were those of a traditional Scotland immersed in the world of

³⁷ Throughout his career Miller would dwell on the response of his critics, often rubbishing negative responses and quoting praise at length in his personal correspondence. In a letter to Mrs Fraser recording the response to his *Footprints of the Creator* in 1849, he writes, 'One, in especial, from the first comparative anatomist in the world (Richard Owen) is singularly warm-hearted and cheering, and as you will not set it down to the score of vulgar vanity, I must just give you an extract, partly in order to show you [...] that I was not mistaken in supposing that the least popular portions of my book would be those to which a certain class of students would attach most interest [...] This, you will agree with me, is worth whole volumes of ignorant criticism; a newspaper reporter, very favourable in the main, speaks of my "rather tedious introduction;" it was, however, not for newspaper reviewers but for men such as Professor Owen that that introduction was written; and the Professor, you see, does not deem it tedious.' (quoted in Bayne, II, 418). The lengthy treatment of Miller's first poetic critic recorded in *My Schools and Schoolmasters* (pp. 420-425) is also a good example of Miller's defensive attitude to his own work.

³⁸ Peter Bayne, II, 214.

³⁹ 'Letter from Hugh Miller, Editor of *The Witness*' reprinted in full in Bayne, II, 256-291 (p. 290).

faith, folklore, rural community and working life. It was Miller's ambition to project this Scotland into the polite and politicised literary world and give voice to the neglected experience of the traditional and working man. In this, Miller was only too aware of his disadvantages. When the opportunity to write finally arose in the shape of *The Witness* editorship, Miller was little surprised by his relative literary and ideological isolation. Yet in standing for the experience of the working man, Miller had chosen to make an alliance with the people.

In so doing it would be necessary for Miller to mediate the apparently conflicting roles of artist and artisan. In the following chapters I examine Miller's conscious manipulation of his public persona and the means by which he projected a literary identity acceptable both to the values of the literary elite whilst retaining his identification with the working people of Scotland.

Chapter Three:

Literary Plaid-Wrapping: The Costume of the Cromarty Stonemason

The presentation of the ‘Cromarty stonemason’ was never intended merely as a literary caricature. It served as a reminder of Miller’s ideological agenda, which sought to mediate between the contending values of nineteenth-century Scotland. Miller was never given to extremes. To his radicalism he lent restraint, to his superstition he lent philosophy, to his religious zeal he lent science. Yet criticism, as we have seen, has tended to regard Miller’s yoking of apparent opposites as evidence of paradox. George Rosie has identified the many anomalies that characterised ‘an enigmatic and baffling man’, noting that not only Miller’s thinking but ‘even Miller’s physique was a paradox’,¹ while Shortland describes Miller’s life as both ‘paradoxical’ and ‘fragmentary’, observing that ‘Miller was not one person at all but several’.² To focus on paradox and duality as a condition of Miller’s mind, of his inherent identity, is misleading. Rather, Miller responded, like so many Scottish Victorians, to a paradoxical and divided culture by developing an adaptable persona. Indeed, it may be equally true that the mental strain that Miller suffered was contingent upon the stresses of responding to a chronically divided cultural situation. In attempting to transgress various kinds of social division and ideological partisanship, Miller often found himself

¹ George Rosie, *Outrage and Order*, p. 16.

² Michael Shortland, *Hugh Miller’s Memoir*, p. 75. Similarly, Christopher Harvie, in his plenary paper at the bicentenary Hugh Miller Conference in 2003, alluded to a ‘controlled conflict’ contained within Miller’s psyche and suggests a possible diagnosis of Asperger’s Syndrome in accounting for Miller’s ‘combination of severe logic in one department and credulity in the other’. (‘Hugh Miller and The Scottish Crisis’ in *Celebrating the Life and Times of Hugh Miller*, ed. by Lester Borley ([n. p.] The Cromarty Arts Trust & the Elphinstone Institute of the University of Aberdeen, 2003), pp.34 – 37 (p. 34, 43)). Eric Richards, in his discussion of Miller’s, apparently contradictory, violence of language and advocacy of pacifism in writing of the Highland Clearances, alludes to Miller’s ‘divided psyche’. (‘Hugh Miller and Resistance to the Highland Clearances’ in *Celebrating the Life and Times of Hugh Miller*, (see Borley, above), pp. 48 – 63 (p. 53)).

intellectually isolated and his beliefs increasingly confounded by an atmosphere of repressive censure.

Concepts of division, paradox and ambivalence have become a keynote of Scottish literary criticism dealing with Scots writers from the eighteenth century onwards.³ Such studies, which tend to examine national identity construction in the wake of the Union of the Parliaments in 1707 is liable to offer specific Scottish cultural diagnoses which ignore the many other political, social and philosophical factors common to the European experience in this age of transition. Moreover, the terminology utilised in this critical paradigm tends to draw heavily from the language of psychoanalysis (with its emphasis on identity crisis, division, alienation and schizophrenia). In this way the symptoms of anxiety and crisis expressed in Scottish culture are extracted from the philosophical and social shifts affecting the whole of European society at this time and made subjectively relevant to an individual national experience. This feature of Scottish criticism is mirrored in the erroneous transference of cultural schism into internal division in the person of Hugh Miller.

Kenneth Simpson, in his examination of cultural role-playing in eighteenth-century Scotland, concedes at the outset of his study that 'role-playing and the

³ David Daiches, in his seminal study, *The Paradox of Scottish Culture The Eighteenth-century Experience* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) identified a strain of contradiction and equivocation which informs the literature of the eighteenth century. Kenneth Simpson's *The Protean Scot: The Crisis of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Scottish Literature* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), dealing with the same period, reveals a literature, and *literati*, characterised by duality and anomaly and manifesting a 'crisis of identity'. Edwin Muir's depiction of a post-Union Scotland divided between heart and head has come to underpin the argument for a kind of collective national psychology, one which Hugh MacDairmid famously described as the 'Caledonian anti-syzygy'. Historians and literary critics have borrowed from psychiatric language in diagnosing the nature of Scotland's 'collective condition'. The historian, T.C. Smout has described Scotland after 1707 as evincing a 'duality of consciousness' (*A Century of the Scottish People 1850-1950*, p. 238), and more overtly Daiches, in his *Robert Burns the Poet* (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 1994), speaks of a 'national schizophrenia' in a 'complex and confused' eighteenth century. In the same way, Douglas Gifford has claimed that 'the schizophrenic Act of Union in 1707 contained the seeds of Scotland's nineteenth-century crisis of identity' ('Introduction' *The History Of Scottish Literature: III: Nineteenth Century* (see Gifford, above) pp. 5-6) and George Davie, in his analysis of the disintegration of a distinctive Scottish intellectual tradition in the course of the nineteenth century, 'The Social Significance of the Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense' has

projection of self-images are commonplace in modern life'.⁴ His argument, however, is that the intensity of such role-playing is 'remarkable' and culturally specific in the case of Scotland. His study offers a comprehensive and convincing analysis of the chameleon identities and positions adopted in the writings of such sophisticated writers as Robert Burns, Tobias Smollet, James Macpherson, Henry Mackenzie and James Boswell. However, the conclusion that this multiplicity and fragmentation is the result of a 'post-Union crisis of identity' (rather than, for example, an experimentation with modern multiplicity of self or a self-conscious manipulation of existing cultural values) derives from Simpson's agreement with Edwin Muir's diagnosis of a Scotland split between an older native coherence and a post-Union fracturing into 'vernacular' and 'polite' culture, which later contributes, in Simpson's assessment, to a situation where 'the redemptive or healing power of Romanticism was powerless to effect any reintegration of the Scottish personality.'⁵

Karl Miller in his study of Henry Cockburn and the Scotland of the nineteenth century similarly suggests that Scotland in that period manifests a specifically cultural duality following its Union with England. Of Cockburn, Miller observes: 'there was a binariness in him, which certain of the preoccupations of his time could hardly have failed to enhance and which could draw him into paradox.'⁶ In particular, Miller is interested in Cockburn's often paradoxical position regarding a native patriotism and a pragmatic adherence to post-Union imperial progress. Discussing the 1843 calotype portraits of David Octavius Hill, Miller observes that 'fancy dress appears in several [...] As we shall see, Cockburn's Scotland was interested in disguise'.⁷ His study

described 'the dangerous consequences of an intellectual atomisation of society – the dreaded alienation' (p. 6).

⁴ Kenneth Simpson, *The Protean Scot*, p. 2.

⁵ Kenneth Simpson, *The Protean Scot*, p. 247.

⁶ Karl Miller, *Cockburn's Millennium* (London: Duckworth Press, 1975), p. xii.

⁷ Karl Miller, *Cockburn's Millennium*, p. 46.

suggests that it was nineteenth-century Scotland, as much as Cockburn himself that manifested a kind of cultural 'dressing up'. His analysis of Cockburn's milieu is clearly nuanced by the reading of Scottish culture as perceptibly contradictory following the traumatic effects of the transition from traditional agrarian Scotland to post-Union industrial Britain.

Some ten years later the same Karl Miller produced a study, entitled *Doubles*, which examined the literary obsession with duality in Western writing. In the nineteenth century the craze for duality, Miller notes, began in Germany and spread to the rest of Europe, culminating in the Gothic fascination with doubles and outsiders and with the 'Romantic multiple man'.⁸ His study, therefore, not only makes reference to the Scottish literature of Scott, Hogg, Carlyle and Stevenson but to the tropes of duality and doubleness in English and Irish literature in Wordsworth, Hazlitt, Keats, Mary Shelley, Dickens, the Bronte sisters, Henry James, Joseph Conrad and James Joyce. And he cites too the fascination with duality and doubles in American literature (in the writing of Emerson, Edgar Alan Poe, Robert Lowell, Mark Twain and Edith Wharton) as well as European and Russian literature (in Hegel, Goethe, Kafka, Jorge Luis Borges and Gogol, Dostoevsky, Chekov and Nabakov). It is clear from this later study that duality is not a specifically Scottish pre-occupation and that it features as a mark of a Western culture which, as Miller writes:

was to conjure up, over these past two hundred years [roughly from 1700 – 1900] the hallucinated double of ancient superstition, to generate, in popular and para-medical contexts, the hypothesis of a supervention, within the individual, of autonomous and adversary selves [...] Duality was to take part in both the Freudian and in the Russian revolutions: to the second leap of these it brought the dialectic of Hegel, with its progressive leaps and interplays.⁹

⁸ Karl Miller, *Doubles: Studies in Literary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 49.

⁹ Karl Miller, *Doubles*, p. viii.

In other words, Miller's study is concerned with the confrontations of tradition and progress, of the theocentric and egocentric world, of class-consciousness and social division and of the impact of a new enlightenment philosophy experienced throughout the Western world.

Finally, it is worth noting that role-playing is not only a feature characteristic of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as Simpson and Miller have noted, but has existed to varying degrees throughout the history of philosophical and literary representation.¹⁰ It is simplistic to assume that role-playing, both in literature and in life, is uncomplicatedly symptomatic of anxiety. As Greenblatt has shown, and as this thesis posits, literary 'self-fashioning' can also be part of a writer's self-conscious mediation of the values of the age. Seen in this context, Miller's own role-playing is perhaps less indicative of internal 'paradox' and 'fragmentation'. In fact, rather than revealing the dividedness of a torn identity, Miller's public persona reveals remarkable confidence in his ambition to mediate between the opposing voices of nineteenth-century Scotland.

The negotiation of Miller's intermediary position, as we shall see, was expressed in complex and often subtle ways. Outwardly, he assumed the pose of the Cromarty stonemason, supported by various aspects of costume and self-dramatisation, and,

¹⁰ If the medieval age, in adhering to a closed system in its theocentric world-view, limited the possibilities of individual self-expression, during the Renaissance Erasmus would announce that men are fashioned rather than born. In Scotland, the Reformation of 1560 was, once again, to suppress that individualistic freedom of expression under a strict system of adherence to a purely divine authored code of conduct. But following from Enlightenment scepticism, man's autonomy was reaffirmed. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, role-playing assumed a peculiarly *literary* self-consciousness. And the fashion for cultural-literary role-playing persists into the twentieth century. When the Scottish Renaissance attempted an ideological return to the literary and spiritual values of the past (values which the nineteenth century was considered to have neglected), a number of writers assumed more overtly 'Scottish' names. Christopher Murray Grieve refashioned himself as the nationalistic guardian, Hugh MacDiarmid, while James Leslie Mitchell assumed the alias of Grampian's Lewis Grassie Gibbon and Neil Munro wrote as Hugh Foulis. In the twenty-first century a new mythology is responding to the modern dilemmas surrounding the nature of Scottish identity. While the 'tartanry' of the nineteenth-century's 'Celtic Twilight' remains popular with tourist marketing, literature has responded with a backlash. The new urban mythology is keen to eschew the sentimental and the elevating, with urban writers increasingly viewed as the modern truth-tellers of the working classes, raised from a background of contemporary nihilism and despair.

within his writing he makes allusions to both establishment and radical literary figures in order to mediate between the values of authority and challenge.

'The Cromarty Stonemason'

From the earliest stages of his career, we see Miller self-consciously negotiating a public persona by which to approach the *literati*, yet a persona at the same time capable of reinforcing his position of integrity and independence. What, to many observers of his time and to modern critics, appear as Miller's working and northern credentials, manifested in his working man's dress and background, can actually be seen as aspects of Miller's conscious 'self-fashioning.' In this chapter I wish to examine the semiotics of Miller's costume of the 'Cromarty stonemason', his adopted manner of dress and his class and cultural role-playing.

Miller's own literary self-consciousness arose from his awareness of an unofficial school of 'working men writers', including Burns, Hogg and Allan Cunningham, who had been successful in capturing the imagination of the literary elite with their appeal to the Romantic fashion for the primitive and noble savage. Miller was a great admirer of Burns, himself the innovator of the complex, chameleon 'peasant/poet' role. In the preface to his *Commonplace Book 1783-1785* Burns alludes to a self-fashioned persona that of an unpolished rustic ploughman 'bred at the plough tail' and 'little indebted to a scholastic education'.¹¹ Yet contemporary criticism has increasingly recognised the sophistication of Burns's learning and his self-interested complicity in playing to the Romantic fashion for the 'humble-born genius'. His manipulation of that persona was aimed at gaining entry into the literary circles of the time. In a similar fashion, Miller's

¹¹ Robert Burns, *Commonplace Book 1783-85* (Glasgow: Gowans & Gray, 1938), p. 1. In *The Protean Scot* Kenneth Simpson deconstructs the Burnsian persona examining the way in which Burns exaggerated features of his family background and obscured details of his education and learning so as to heighten his appeal as a natural born genius, the heaven-taught ploughman of Henry Mackenzie's generation.

Poems Written in the Leisure Hours of a Journeyman Mason (1829) deliberately highlights his rustic credentials from the outset. In his 'Dedication' he humbly offers his poetry as a kind of unpolished ore, filtered from the grime of a menial existence:

I deem my book a repository of thoughts and feeling, neither low nor vulgar, which have been formed and experienced in a walk of life where thought is seldom vigorous and feeling delicate. I conceive that some of what it contains may with propriety be likened to those ores which, rugged in their external form, are yet fraught with metal, excellent, when purified by the refiner.¹²

Miller's intention, however, unlike Burns in the Preface to his *Commonplace Book*, was less to secure financial patronage and more to gain cultural acceptance, and his self-projection as an artist in penury was exaggerated to achieve that aim. Conscious of the potential attractions of the peasant-poet to the nineteenth-century *literati*, Miller first experimented with the persona of the 'Cromarty stonemason' in approaching the local literary figures of northern Scotland in the early 1830s. In a letter to his literary patron, Sir Thomas Lauder, in 1833, Miller can be seen as developing the pose of the humble mason:

The same cast of mind which has enabled me to overcome not a few of the obstacles which my place in society and an imperfect education have conspired to cast in my way, and this too at a time when the approval of such men as the gentleman of whom I have now the honour of addressing was a meed beyond the reach of even my fondest anticipations, shall, I trust, enable me to persist in improving to the utmost the powers which I naturally possess [...] Still, however, I indulge in hopes and expectations which I would ill like to forgo,- hopes

¹² Hugh Miller, *Poems Written in the Leisure Hours of A Journeyman Mason*, (Inverness: R. Carruthers, 1829), p. 6. In his 'Note to the reader', which ends the volume, Miller anticipated the reception of his critics with a defensive address. 'It is more than possible', it reads, 'that I have completely failed in poetry. Possible, have I said! nay, it is probable [...] The pleasure which I enjoy in composing verses is quite independent of other men's opinions of them; and I expect to feel as happy as ever in that amusement, even though assured that others could find no pleasure in reading what I had found so much in writing [...] my predilection for poetry has not prevented me from acquiring the skill of at least the common mechanic. I am not more ignorant of masonry and architecture than many professors of these arts who never measured a stanza [...] I can prove that my mistake in supposing myself a poet, is not a whit more ridiculous, but infinitely less mischievous than many of those into which myriads of my fellow men are falling every day.' (*PJM*, 266-268) Miller's literary insecurity leads him to a pre-emptive counter attack, whereas Burns's address betrays a greater confidence in his mutability as both 'poet' and peasant.

perhaps of being somewhat less obscure, and somewhat abler to assist such of my relatives as are poorer than even myself; but the future belongs to God. Winter, my season of leisure, is fast approaching, and should I live to see its close, I shall probably find myself ten or twenty chapters deep in the second volume.¹³

Here, Miller plays upon his 'primitive origins,' alluding to the poverty of his relatives and the instability of his own background in order to promote a picture of the 'struggling artist'. Similarly, in his autobiographical letter to Baird, Miller opened thus: 'I am mistaken if I have anything to fear from the evils of success, and as for those of its contrary, as I have been battling with those all life long, "I shall go forth against them even as at other times"'.¹⁴ In these few words Miller projects both a position of humility as well as displaying a literary mind raised from a background of struggle.

Yet Miller's class position was not nearly so simple as his attestations of 'humble origin' would have him appear. While he identified with the working experience and the traditional communities of the Scottish commonalty, Miller was no working-class radical. During his time as a mason he rarely participated in workmen's social activities, preferring to converse only with 'men of intelligence'. He disparaged the Trade Union movement and the Chartist movement, advocating self-cultivation over political emancipation. Indeed, in his autobiography, Miller often presents himself as something of an 'outsider' in the mason's barracks.

There was no-one in the barrack with whom I cared much to converse, or who, in turn, cared much to converse with me; and so I learned, on the occasions when the company got dull, and broke up into groups, to retire to the hay loft where I slept, and pass there whole hours seated on my chest. (S&S, 202)

While Miller's writings stress his experience of working life and his empathy with traditional and labouring communities, he does not explicitly place himself within that

¹³ Hugh Miller, letter to Sir Thomas Lauder, LB71 (18 October 1833).

community, but rather emphasises his speculative detachment from them. His writing typically mediates between a tone of almost anthropological objectivity as well as benevolent concern for the conditions of working people. As such, Miller implies simultaneous positions of empathy and impartiality as one who both *identifies* with the life of the working man yet is also intellectually detached from the actual community that he is observing. In a short semi-fictional essay written for John Mackay Wilson's *Tales of the Borders* (1845?)¹⁵, Miller describes a traditional Cromarty lykewake. His companion 'a friend from the south, - a man of an inquiring and highly philosophic cast of mind' makes enquires of Miller, who assumes the role of local antiquary:

"Is the custom of watching beside the dead of remote antiquity in this part of the country?" [...]

"Far beyond the reach of either history or tradition," I said, "But it has gradually been changing in character, as the people have been changing theirs: it is now a very different thing from what it was a century ago. It is not yet ninety years since lykewakes in the neighbouring Highlands used to be celebrated with music and dancing; and even here, on the borders of the low country, they used invariably, like the funerals of antiquity, to be the scenes of wild games and amusements never introduced on any other occasion. You remember how Sir Walter describes the funeral of Athelstane? The Saxon ideas of condolence were the most natural imaginable. If grief was hungry, they supplied it with food; if thirsty, they gave it drink. Our simple ancestors seemed to have reasoned by a similar process. They made their seasons of deepest grief their times of greatest merriment; and the more they regretted the deceased, the gayer they were at his wake and his funeral." (*T&S*, 171-2)

This anthropological tone with regards to the belief of his fellow townsfolk is a feature too of Miller's later *Scenes and Legends*:

¹⁴ Hugh Miller, 'letter to Baird,' p. 89.

¹⁵ Of the six volumes of *Wilson's Tales of the Borders*, the first editions were issued in parts from 1835-40 and thereafter reissued in a variety of bound formats, from 2 to 24 volumes. Michael Shortland's 1996 bibliography of Miller in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science* cites a publication of *Wilson's Tales* published by William Mackenzie in London, tentatively dated [1845?]. Miller's contributions were as follows: 'The Widow of Dunskaith', II, 409-13; 'Recollections of Ferguson', III, 81-91; 'Recollections of Burns', III, 145-58; 'The Salmon-Fisher of Udoll', III, 313-19; 'The Lykewake', IV, 41-48; 'Bill Whyte', IV, 161-69. All these appear in the posthumous *Tales and Sketches* (1863). Miller is also credited by Alexander Leighton, who revised an 1891 edition of *Wilson's Tales*, with the authorship of two other tales, 'The Scottish Hunters of Hudson Bay' and 'Thomas of Chartres.'

My town's folk in this age – an age in which every extra-ordinary effect was coupled with a supernatural cause – were too ingenious to account for the failure of the trade by a simple reference to the natural history of the herring; and two stories relating to it still survive, which show them to have been strangely acute in rendering a reason, and not a little credulous in forming a belief. (S&L, 256)

In such passages, the narrative voice is one of detached narrative curiosity. Miller is not condescending in his descriptions, but always *apart* from the action, always the observer. This perspective implicitly signals his social and intellectual detachment from the scenes that he is describing, yet at the same time utilises his experience of these communities to heighten the authority of his accounts. When Miller came to write his famous *Letter to Lord Brougham* in 1840, he was realising his role as both 'one of the people' (the signature he gave to his letter) and one with the authority to write *on behalf* of the people. In this way, Miller finally achieved a literary voice capable of combining his agenda as a working writer but sanctioned with the authority of his (self-) educated, detached prose style. The editorship of the Free Church newspaper, which resulted from Miller's *Letter*, meant that he was able to eschew the necessity for patronage and retain a position of relative independence. The composite literary persona of the 'Cromarty stonemason', which had captured the attention of Miller's first admirers, would now become an integral part of Miller's literary voice in the capital.

The 'Cromarty Stonemason' in Edinburgh

The figure of the self-educated stonemason, articulating the voice of the people's church in the heated climate of the early 1840s, was one that captured the popular imagination. Recalling Miller's impact on the people of Scotland, Bayne has written:

The voice of *The Witness* was known to be his voice, and the name of Hugh Miller was mentioned with affectionate enthusiasm, as that of the people's own champion. Never have I witnessed so steady, intense, enthralling an excitement. And I have no difficulty, even at this distance, in discriminating the name that rang loudest in this agitated land. It was that of Hugh Miller, - the people's friend, champion, hero! It was appropriate that a self-educated man should speak for the commonalty of Scotland. It suited the stubborn independence and self-serving vigour of the race. The popular imagination, besides, ready always to be moved by adventitious circumstances, found an additional charm and picturesqueness in his having been a stonemason, one who had actually 'bared a quarry' and hewn in a churchyard. But this rugged plebeian, who stood forth to fight the people's battle, was not one who required the indulgence of the refined critics.¹⁶

Bayne's description is typically hyperbolic but as such, it highlights the attractions of Miller's proletarian status in engaging the popular imagination. The popular market was, at that time, disposed to receive a 'rugged plebeian' as 'champion of the people', an uneducated stonemason to fight the causes of the working classes. And for Miller, assuming the literary persona of the (rural Scottish) Cromarty (working-class) stonemason offered an identity which could counter, simultaneously, the twin values of cultural Anglophilia and class snobbery being maintained in the capital.

Some of Miller's most outspoken journalism was written on the subject of Scotland's infringed freedoms.¹⁷ Miller was fiercely protective of Scotland's cultural integrity, and his first published works, the miscellaneous fictions written for John Mackay Wilson's *Tales of the Borders* (1845), *Scenes and Legends of the North of*

¹⁶ Peter Bayne, II, p. 213.

¹⁷ 'An Illustration of the Bothy System' (*The Witness*, 22 September 1841); 'The Cottages of Our Hinds' (*The Witness*, 22 January 1842); 'The Burns Festival and Hero-Worship' (*The Witness*, 24 August 1844); 'A Highland Clearing' (*The Witness*, 4 September, 1844); 'Sutherland As It Was And Is' (*The Witness*, 16 August - 9 September 1843); 'Our Scottish Tenantry' (*The Witness*, 18 February, 1846); 'Destitution in the Highlands and Islands' (*The Witness*, 25 November 1846); 'Past and Present Conditions of the Highlands' (*The Witness*, 12 December 1846); 'Glen Tilt Tabooed' (*The Witness*, 1 September 1847); 'Reform in the Scottish Universities' (*The Witness*, 1 June, 1849); 'Highland Clearings' (*The Witness*, 8 September, 1849); 'The Depopulation of the Highlands' (*The Witness*, 15, 19, 22 September, 1849); 'Highland Destitution' (*The Witness*, 15, 22 March, 1851); 'The Highlands' (*The Witness*, 20 September 1851); 'Our Scottish Universities' (*The Witness*, 15 April, 1853); 'Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights' (*The Witness*, 29 June, 1853); Untitled essay on political centralisation, (*The Witness*, 3 June, 1854); 'Scottish University Reform' (*The Witness*, 17 November, 1855); 'Macaulay on Scotland' [a scathing critique of Macaulay's 'pure exaggeration' and 'revolting caricature' in his depiction of Highland culture and Scottish history in his *The History of England* (1849 - 61) (*The Witness*, 6, 13, 27 February, 1856).

Scotland; or, the Traditional History of Scotland (1835) and *The Cruise of The Betsey; or, A Summer Ramble among the Fossiliferous Deposits of the Hebrides. With Rambles of a Geologist; or, Ten Thousand Miles over the Fossiliferous Deposits of Scotland* (1838), are an attempt to preserve the record of a traditional northern culture which he saw fast receding. Not apt to be partisan, Miller was sympathetic to the aims of the Union, and his book *First Impressions of England and its People* (1847) can be read as an honest investigation of English culture and people, perhaps even as an attempt to redress the imbalance of 'anthropological' dissections of Scotland (in the manner of Johnson and Boswell) by offering the first impressions of a Scot viewing England. Like Scott, Miller did not find his British loyalty incompatible with a feeling of Scottish patriotism. What Miller resisted was not so much the cultural impact of union with England (his conception of a literary canon is manifestly a British one, combined of Scots and English writers of equal cultural value) but the trend towards English centralism and the indifference of an 'Imperial Legislature'¹⁸ which threatened to undermine the autonomy and power of Scotland's distinctive traditions and institutions.

Miller's adoption of the plaid in Edinburgh was, like Hogg's, one way of signalling his affiliation with traditional Scotland in the face of such cultural imperialism. His self-depictions lent a degree of self-mythologising to the presentation of his cultural position. He portrayed the northern town of Cromarty, in which he was raised, as an isolated rural hamlet far from the insidious effects of cultural assimilation. In *Scenes and Legends*, the first of Miller's prose works, he offers Cromarty as the location for his presentation of the traditional history of Scotland, demarcating a

¹⁸ In an untitled essay the following year Miller complained that the Union of 1707 had created an 'Imperial Legislature' endowed with sufficient power to 'play havoc with the institutions of the lesser [nation]' and he argued that the Disruption of the established Church in Scotland was 'a result produced directly by the legislative interference of those who had no interests in the matter, and no possible right to interfere, except through that system of centralization which is invading us like a flood.' (*The Witness*, 3 June, 1854). I discuss Miller's treatment of Scottish national subjects at greater length in Chapter 7.

Cromarty of legend and folklore, of traditional community, and setting it within the ceaseless chain of history. In *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, Cromarty is evoked in the rugged cliffs of Eathie Bay and the moors upon which Miller plays as a child. Yet the Cromarty of Miller's boyhood was a thriving port with a population of over 2,000 inhabitants and one that had seen the improvements of mercantile expansion and the Victorian building boom. It was not until the 1830s, when Miller was in his twenties, that Cromarty began to decline, and even then it could not be considered a place untouched by the developments of a rapidly modernising Scotland. Nevertheless, Miller's representation of Cromarty had always tended to centre on its rural and traditional aspects. The historian, David Alston, has recently commented upon Miller's depictions of Cromarty:

One may suspect that such inaccuracies are features of the image that Miller created for himself when in Edinburgh, and a suitably wild place of origin for the bulky, stooped figure in antiquated shepherd's plaid, which he presented to his public.¹⁹

In a similar way, Miller utilised the ennobling associations of his Scottish ancestors to reinforce his cultural self-positioning. His autobiography opens with the romantic narrative of his buccaneering grandfather, John Feddes, and, on his mother's side, the Gael, Donald Roy Ross, painted by Miller as a semi-pagan Highlander famed for his second sight and as a fierce defender of Presbyterianism in the seventeenth century. With the fashion for the Romanticised Scottish past, popularised by Macpherson and Scott, still raging, the image of the pagan spirit of the heroic Celt and the fiery independence of the Scottish Covenanter still held great sway in the popular imagination. Miller's appeal to an ancestral bloodline of Celts and religious warriors

¹⁹ David Alston, 'The Fallen Meteor: Hugh Miller and Local Tradition' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above), pp. 206 – 230 (p. 207).

allowed him to establish a pool of characteristics from which he would draw when the time came to fashion a portrait of himself. In a passage narrating his role as a diplomatic arbitrator between the demands of the Inverness politicians and the protection of the Cromarty people during the cholera outbreak in the 1830s, Miller invokes the image of his ancestors:

A man of high spirit and influence – a banker, and very much a Whig – at once addressed me with a stern – “By what authority, Sir?” “By the authority,” I replied, “of five hundred able-bodied men in the neighbouring town, associated for the protection of themselves and their families.” “Protection against what?” “Protection against the pestilence; - you come from an infected place.” “Do you know what you are doing, Sir?” said the banker fiercely. “Yes, doing what the law cannot do for us, but what we have determined to do for ourselves.” The banker grew pale with anger; and he was afterward heard to say, that had he had a pistol at the time, he would have shot upon the spot the man who stopped him; but not having a pistol, he could not shoot me; and so I sent him and his party away [...] I was aware I acted on this occasion a very foolish part; I ought to a certainty to have run away on the approach of the Inverness cavalcade, but the running away would have involved, according to Rochester, an amount of moral courage, which I did not possess. I fear, too, I must admit that the banker’s address stirred up what had long lain quietly enough in my veins – some of the wild buccaneering blood of John Feddes and the old seafaring Millers. (*S&S*, 464)

Here Miller depicts himself as a representative of the people and this in explicit contrast with the arrogant authority of the professional ‘banker’ who stands quite by contrast with Miller, as proletarian stonemason. The contrast is, no doubt, deliberate, as are the tones of interrogation and aroused anger on the part of the Whig official set against the quiet dignity of Miller’s responses. Yet neither is Miller to be regarded as submissive. Here Miller rekindles the spirit of his heroic ancestral figures to flesh out a depiction of himself, capable of combining the pragmatic diplomacy of the modern man of reason with the fiery sense of justice associated with Scotland’s heroic past. The recourse to the imagery of his Celtic ancestry parallels the very literal ‘plaid-wrapping’ by which he was identified during his years in the Lowland literary capital. The strategy worked.

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In Thomas Brown's 1858 biography, his opening chapter 'Ancestry and Early Life' followed from Miller's lead. Brown utilises Miller's association of 'wild buccaneering blood' to endorse his heroic depiction of Miller, claiming that 'sufficient of incident and character are reproduced, to enable us to form a very definite idea of the tributary human streams from which the Cromarty stonemason sprang'.²⁰ Miller manipulates a portrait of his upbringing which will support the image of the self-educated Cromarty stonemason, cut off from institutional, modern influences. In this respect Cromarty, and Miller's depiction of his cultural background, is drawn into Miller's self-representation, and he borrows from nineteenth-century ideological conceptions of romanticised northern Scotland to develop aspects of his literary persona.

Allied to these depictions of his northern background is Miller's presentation of the persona of the working man. In several written accounts, Miller promoted the idea that he was born of humble parentage.²¹ Yet his father's employment as a shipmaster allowed him to bring in enough income to ensure that his wife did not have to work and the family owned their own home as well as property in Leith. It was only after the death of his father that Miller knew hard times as a child. Nevertheless, his uncles financially supported Miller so that he never had to forgo his schooling in order to work - in fact, his uncle James raised the funds to send Hugh to the local subscription school. Whilst this does not place Miller amongst the privileged classes, it does challenge the notion that Miller was born of peasant stock. The support of his uncles meant that the opportunity of university was open to the boy should he wish to take it. It was Miller's fierce sense of independence that saw him strike out early in the world as a working

²⁰ Thomas Brown, *Labour and Triumph*, p. 13.

²¹ As well as his published autobiography, several of Miller's private correspondences, notably to local literary figures and potential patrons, allude to his humble circumstances and poverty.

man - his decision to undertake the humble life of a stonemason was one of free will, not necessity. Miller *chose* to identify himself with the labouring classes.

Few accounts, recorded by those of his own times, fail to note the practical aspect of Miller's demeanour in the capital. In dress, he maintained an appearance of rusticity, eschewing the neat formality or bohemian excesses popular with the literary gentlemen of the day.²² A family friend and society lady, Marion Wood, described to Bayne that Miller's 'appearance then was that of a superior working-man in his Sunday dress'.²³ And similarly Dr McCosh has observed, 'in dress he neither affected a slovenly carelessness nor a prim gentility. It was very much the dress worn on Sundays by the better class of tradesmen and upland farmers.'²⁴ Bayne too, offers a dramatic recollection of the figure of Hugh Miller:

The leonine roughness of his exterior, the shaggy hair, the strong-boned overhanging brows, the head carried far forward and shoulders bent as with brooding thought, the workman's gait and gesture [...] Never was [...] the possibility that one may be every inch the true gentleman and yet every inch *not* a conventional gentleman [...] more signally illustrated than in the case of Hugh Miller.²⁵

Bayne's comment highlights Miller's dismissal of conventional appearance: his dress is intended to signal a distinction between himself and the social elite. Through this kind of self-presentation, Miller was able to actually utilise the discrimination of polite society as a dividing line by which to demarcate his distinction from them. A telling passage in Miller's autobiography gives an insight into this defensive use of costume. The passage recalls his response to a friend with whom he had quarrelled as

²² In her biographical account of John Wilson, Elsie Swann records how Wilson was known to parade Edinburgh in loosely tied-back hair and a long slovenly coat, affecting a foppish indifference and a manner of academic carelessness. Carlyle, too, noted Wilson's striking appearance in the capital: 'His clothing was rough [...] A] hat of broadish brim flanked [...] such overplus of strong unclipped, flaxen hair, [that] seemed to have known many showers in its time.' (p.63)

²³ 'Recollections of a Lady' recorded in Bayne, II, 344.

²⁴ Dr McCosh, 'Recollections' recorded in Bayne, II, 451.

²⁵ Peter Bayne, I, 278.

a child and who had lately returned to Cromarty, having risen to the position of an apprentice grocer. Commenting on the social implications of this promotion, Miller advises thus: 'To those who move in the upper walks, the superiority in status of the village shop-keeper over the journeyman mason may not be very perceptible; but surveyed from the lower levels of society, it is quite obvious enough.' (S&S, 234) Given this, Miller's response to his friend's return is extremely interesting. The passage reads:

I assumed the leathern apron, which I had thrown aside for the winter at Martinmas, and stalked past him in my working dress – a veritable operative mason – eyeing him steadfastly as I passed. He looked at me for a moment without sign of recognition and then turned indifferently away. (S&S, 235)

The passage reveals that, in response to the news of his friend's new-found status, Miller actually returned home to change out of his everyday clothes and *assume* his working costume. The friend had, in fact, not recognised Miller because of his changed appearance as an adult.²⁶ But Miller instead assumes 'that he did not choose to reckon among his friends a humble working mason'. (S&S, 235) Thus, Miller is utilising his appearance as a form of provocation, inviting his estranged friend to either reject him or accept him *on his own terms*. It is this same motivation that inspires Miller's adoption of the working costume in the literary capital: in maintaining operative dress he is setting out his ideological affiliations as a literary figure. This kind of self-presentation is powerfully projected in the calotypes taken of Miller in 1843 by David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson. Miller later described the image in his own words.

²⁶ In the account Miller later concedes, 'The evening has set in before I left the house, and it was now approaching to dark; the dress I wore was different from any in which my friend had ever seen me; I had besides grown nearly six inches taller since he had left the country; but of those circumstances I never once thought; - my conclusion was that he knowingly slighted me. He has since told me that he has not the slightest recollection of the recounter. [sic]', 'letter to Baird', p. 165.

[A] bonneted mechanic rests over his mallet on a tombstone – his one arm bared above his elbow; the other wrapped up in the well-indicated shirt-folds, and resting on a piece of grotesque sculpture.²⁷

[for images of Miller's self-representation see Appendix B]

Miller was, however, at this time, a successful newspaper editor and published writer in Scotland's literary capital. It was several years since he had abandoned masonry, and had since settled comfortably in 5 Sylvan Lane on the south side of the Edinburgh meadows. Yet, as an established man of letters, Miller chose not to pose behind a desk with a quill and ink. He instead donned his workman's clothes and posed next to a piece of masonry, chisel in hand. The calotype shows Miller in the costume of the Cromarty stonemason of some seven years previous. Michael Shortland, in his analysis of Hugh Miller, has observed, 'it is quite possible that in dressing up – or dressing down – Miller was not posing at all (he valued transparency in such matters) but in complicated ways realising an authentic self.'²⁸ Yet to say that Miller realised a more integral self through the working man persona is too simplistic. Miller was equally capable of promoting his academic credentials, as J. G. Tunny's 1854 photograph and Ballou's portraits attest (see Appendix B). Furthermore, Miller did not necessarily identify solely with the role of the working man. The combination of Hill's, Tunny's and Balliol's images reveals Miller's intention to *mediate* between the presentation of conventional respectability and the more confrontational persona of the common stonemason. Miller well understood the provocative connotations of working dress in a society marked by social hierarchy and class prejudice. The costume of the working man was thus both a barrier placed between Miller and those Edinburgh men of letters

²⁷ Hugh Miller, 'The Calotype' (*The Witness*, 12 July 1843).

²⁸ Shortland, Michael 'Bonneted Mechanic and Narrative Hero: the Self-Modelling of Hugh Miller,' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above), p. 15.

who disparaged him as well as a badge of his working identity signalling his relation to the working people of Scotland.

By means of both his external dress and his narrative self-presentation Miller was able to construct the persona of the 'Cromarty stonemason', borrowing from the literary conventions of the 'peasant poet' made marketable after Burns and from the fashion for primitive culture and 'the noble savage' promoted during the Romantic era. Miller was quite self-conscious in his adoption of this role. First utilising it as a means of attracting patronage from the *literati* of the north, Miller's translation of the Cromarty mason into his career as a 'man of letters' in Edinburgh allowed him to signal both his cultural and political relations to the *literati* of the capital. His distinctive Scottish plaid and working man's dress was a gesture towards his autonomy as a traditional Scottish working man and, as such, signalled his outward rejection of the dominant bourgeois British values upheld in the literary capital. Yet Miller could also assume that the *literati's* cultural attachments to a rustic and Romanticised Scotland would at least ensure that they humoured him. In so doing, Miller clothed his subversive agenda in the costume of the fashionably sanctioned 'peasant poet.' From behind the rustic mask of the Cromarty stonemason, Miller was enabled to raise himself into the elite sphere of nineteenth-century letters and from this vantage point to declaim upon the abuses and disaffection of a self-serving political and literary hegemony.

Chapter Four:

Miller's Ideological Allies: The Appropriation of Literary Icons

'My curiosity is never more active than when it has the person of a great man for its object.'
Hugh Miller¹

If Miller aimed to achieve a public persona which could signal both his relations to the *literati* and the working people of Scotland, it is in his writing corpus that the negotiation between the values of authority and challenge is most skilfully realised. Miller, as we have seen, was conscious of the class and cultural tensions which exacerbated the polarisation of art and labour in the nineteenth century. With literature increasingly entrenched in competing socio-political positions and values, literary figures quickly came to symbolise ideological stances. Miller himself recognised the tendency for writers to exist outwith their work as iconic ideological symbols. In his indictment of the Burns Festival in 1844, he wrote:

The *man* Burns exists as a large idea in the national mind, altogether independent of his literary standing [...] But we would not choose to go and worship at this festival. There was a hollowness about the ceremony, independent of the falseness of the principles on which its ritual was framed. Of the thousands who attended, how many would have sympathised had they seen the light some fifty years earlier with the *man* Robert Burns? How many of them grappled in idea at his festival with other than a mere phantom of the imaginable - a large but intangible shape, obscure and indefinable as that conjured up by the uninformed Londoner of Cromwell or Johnson?"² [Italics in original]

Miller's distinction between 'man' and 'idea' recognises that the iconic literary figure is eventually divorced from individuality and creative production and instead comes to index an ideological corpus far greater than himself. Miller had recognised this of Scott, too. In another *Witness* article, Miller reflected upon Scott's 'great nationality':

¹ Hugh Miller, 'letter to Baird,' p. 210.

² Hugh Miller, 'The Burns Festival and Hero Worship' (*The Witness*, 24 August, 1844).

Wherever his writings are known, a Scotsman can be no mere abstraction [...] Within the country itself, too, his great nationality, like that of Burns, has a decidedly favourable effect.³

While Burns signified to Scotland the hero of the traditional, radical, oral voice, at the other end of the scale Walter Scott was the reigning figure of an Enlightened, literary, post-Union Scotland.⁴

These values did not exist as a rigid polarity of opposites in the nineteenth century, however. Rather, the literary climate of the time presented a spectrum of values within which shades of negotiation existed between these two extremes. Yet a polarity existed with figures such as Scott, Jeffrey, Cockburn, Wilson, Lockhart and others, who could be seen to embody the values of the establishment voice, on one hand and, at the other extreme, the radical, peripheral voices of figures such as Burns, Allan Cunningham, John Mitchell and William Thom representing variously and to

³ Hugh Miller, 'The Scott Monument' (*The Witness*, 19 August 1840).

⁴ Culturally speaking, the romantic narrative of the Scottish nation, established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is dialectically constructed around two antithetically juxtaposed literary icons: Robert Burns and Walter Scott. Several critics identify a composite of Burns-Scott in post-Romantic Scotland. Andrew Nash writes, 'When the tourist industry began to gather pace in mid-century, it was the land of Scott and the land of Burns that the guidebooks highlighted and to which the visitors flocked' ('The Cotters Kailyard' in *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority*, (see Crawford, above), pp.183 - 4) while, similarly, Christopher Harvie, writing on the role of the writer in the fashioning of Scottish cultural identity, notes that 'Burns and Scott became precursors of a model European nationalism that came to be expressed through the ballads and the 'ideal types' of the historical novel' ('Ballads of A Nation (Scottish Cultural Identity)', *History Today*, September 1999, p. 3). Marilyn Butler's identification of the Scott-Burns dialectic is most discriminating in its assessment of what these two national icons functioned to represent: 'Burns is the first of our cultural nationalists, through his brilliantly-imagined construction of modern Scotland. In drawing together a nation, he both anticipates Scott and outdoes him: for, though the same elements are present in both, the emphases are different. Scott the laird goes on to make more of the historically picturesque – Bannockburn, and the Border and Jacobite songs. Burns, more active and contemporary, gives us the parish Scotland of the creepy-stool and the Excise, the 'Court of Equity', the mutual benefit society and the cornrigs.' ('Burns and Politics' in *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority*, (see Crawford, above), p. 112.) Critical preferences aside, Butler's assessment nicely summarises the retrospectively antithetical conception of Burns and Scott, retrospectively in that this was, crucially, not a literal polarisation but a metaphorical one. Recent scholarship has established Burns's complicity with the Edinburgh *literati* and his facility with anglicised manners and literary mores at the same time that it has moderated the false conception of Scott as a Tory pro-Unionist by stressing the complexity of his attitudes towards Scottish nationalism and his sympathetic realization of working-class characters. But certainly, from the nineteenth century onwards, literary iconography positioned Robert Burns and Walter Scott at extremes, with Burns constructed as the radical rustic and Scott the enlightened man of letters.

greater or lesser degrees, the traditional voice of social and political radicalism and who held to regional dialect and experimented with older forms of storytelling.⁵

A number of critics have described what they regard as Miller's adulation of established literary figures. Thomas Brown in his 1858 biography praised Miller for his empathy with iconic figures such as Shakespeare and Burns, observing that, in this human identification, Miller avoided the hollow lip-service of hero-worship fashionable in the period.⁶ Mackenzie, too, noted that Miller 'studies closely the general form, the tones and turns of expression characterising a well-defined group of writers and shapes his own performance accordingly'.⁷ James Robertson has noted the pervasive model of Scott in particular in Miller's work,⁸ and Richard Dorson has commented that Scott's name runs through *My Schools and Schoolmasters* 'like a deity'.⁹ Michael Shortland, noting Miller's appropriation of literary models, and in particular his relationship to Scott, writes:

What is striking is the extent to which he modelled himself on fictional heroes. His life at certain junctures seems almost to have been a kind of plagiarism, imitating literary reality. Miller tried on various literary styles: the polish of Pope and Gray, the vividness of Macaulay, the music of Milton. It was finally Sir Walter Scott who won him over body and soul.¹⁰

⁵ Between these two extremes mediating voices existed. James Hogg, as I have noted, was in many ways himself compromised by his attempts to straddle the traditional and establishment positions. Even Thomas Carlyle, in his early years, sought to attain a position of literary authority by which to declaim upon a society bereft of humane and spiritual integrity. In Appendix C, 'The Anxiety of the Autodidact,' I compare Miller's position with other self-taught and working-men writers, writers that Miller himself identified collectively, and also with the more established literary figures of Hogg and Carlyle who can, in their own ways, be viewed as humble-born writers mediating the dialectic of authority and challenge in their work. Carlyle is positioned as a 'mediating' figure, not because he lacked authority, which he certainly achieved later in life but because Carlyle experienced his own difficulties in discovering the voice with which to criticise Victorian society. It is from this 'search for a voice' and from Carlyle's profound influence upon Miller that fruitful comparison can be drawn.

⁶ Thomas Brown, *Labour and Triumph*, pp. 224-246.

⁷ W. M. Mackenzie, *Hugh Miller*, p. 25.

⁸ James Robertson, 'Scenes, Legends and Storytelling in the Making of Hugh Miller,' in *Hugh Miller in Context, Geologist and Naturalist, Writer and Folklorist: The Cromarty Years and the Edinburgh Years* ed. by Lester Borley, collection of papers collected at two conferences: 'The Cromarty Years' (2000) and 'The Edinburgh Years' (2001) ([n. p.] Published by the Cromarty Arts Trust in collaboration with The National Trust for Scotland and National Museums of Scotland), pp. 17-26.

⁹ Richard M. Dorson, *The British Folklorists* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1968), p. 142.

¹⁰ Michael Shortland, *Hugh Miller's Memoir*, p. 37.

Shortland proposes that Miller was attracted to the model of Scott because his fiction offered 'a world of heroes and demons, of clear moral distinctions', and, developing his thesis regarding Miller's gender role-playing, because, 'Scott's work offers an approachable [...] ideal of manhood and manliness'. Scott himself, Shortland continues, 'was perceived as the archetypal 'manly' author'. However, a distinction must be made between 'the model' and Miller's self-modelling itself. Miller did not, as Shortland implies, model himself on Scott. Rather, we see Miller appropriating Scott as an available ideological ally to substantiate Miller's own peripheral status and some of his more controversial ideas. Shortland's identification of Scott as the archetypal manly author implies a more profound status: Scott in fact functioned as an archetypal model of conventional (admittedly patriarchal) establishment values. Most of Scotland's literary figures looked to him as the reigning voice of Scottish letters,¹¹ and not only in his literary criticism but also in his diagnosis of Scottish affairs in general. Miller looked to Scott not just as a figure of literary authority but as a contemporary standard by which to gauge current thinking.

Scott's world of 'heroes and demons' was certainly important to Miller. The preternatural influences with which Miller grew up were to be a persistent fascination to the adult writer. Miller's work returns again and again to the subjects of breakdown, death, supernatural portent and the otherworldly as if probing back to the unresolved tensions that marked his childhood. Artistically, Miller would recurrently treat society's outcasts: gypsies, travellers, widows and madwomen as the subjects and heroes of his tales. Miller's persistent fascination was with the peripheral experience and the liminal

¹¹ Hogg often looked to Scott for literary endorsement (See Appendix C, 'The Anxiety of the Autodidact'). Similarly, Allan Cunningham when a mason's apprentice in Nithsdale, walked eighty miles to Edinburgh to see his hero pass along the streets. Samuel Smiles in his biography of Robert Chambers noted the publisher's admiration for Scott and Caroline McCracken-Flescher has also identified Scott's

borders of our understanding of the world. Little wonder then that Scott's fiction, populated by romantic anti-heroes and structured between the values of psychological rationality and the haunting possibilities of the supernatural, appealed so much to Miller. In his first short stories, written around 1835 and published in *Wilson's Tales of the Borders* Miller experimented with forms of supernatural storytelling, but his fascination with the supernatural is a persistent theme which recurs in almost all his works – fictional as well as non-fictional. Scott's utilisation of the machinery of the supernatural in his novels prior to 1820 had stamped the Scottish supernatural upon nineteenth-century Romanticism. Miller's interest in what was increasingly regarded as 'distasteful primitivism' could then, nevertheless, take Scott as its precedent, and he repeatedly invokes Scott's name and fiction in his treatment of the supernatural.¹² The following passage from *My Schools and Schoolmasters* is characteristic. In recounting the tradition of the haunted Conon river, Miller remarks:

But the poetic age is ever a credulous one, as certainly in individuals as in nations: the old fears of the supernatural may be modified and etherealised but they continue to influence it [...] The old chapel among the woods formed the scene, says tradition, of an incident similar to that which Sir Walter Scott relates in his 'Heart of Midlothian' when borrowing as the motto of the chapter which describes the preparations for the execution of Porteous, from an author rarely quoted – the kelpie. "The Hour's come," so runs the extract, "but not the man," – nearly the same words which the same author employs in his 'Guy Mannering' in the cave scene between Meg Merrilies and Dick Hatteraick. "There is a tradition," he adds, in the accompanying note, "that while a little stream was swollen by a torrent by recent showers, the discontented voice of the water spirit was heard to pronounce these words. At the same moment, a man urged on by his fate, or in Scottish language, *fey*, arrived at a gallop and prepared to cross the water. No remonstrance from the bystanders was of power to stop him; he plunged into the stream and perished" So far Sir Walter. The Ross-shire story is fuller, and somewhat different in its details... (S&S, 193)

importance to Carlyle. See also *Scott and His Influence* ed. J. H. Alexander and David Hewitt (Aberdeen, University of Aberdeen, 1983).

¹² In 'The Lykewake,' *Tales and Sketches* p. 172, in *The Cruise of the Betsey* pp. 27, 57, 127, in *Rambles of A Geologist* pp. 247, 272, 338, 389, 402, 452, 472, 480, in *First Impressions of England* pp. 42, 232, 335, and in *My Schools and Schoolmasters* pp. 24, 193, 222, 343.

Having established Scott as a defence against the charge of dealing with an unsuitable subject, Miller goes on to indulge in the re-telling of supernatural tales. The alliance with Scott, however, is two-pointed. While it marks the supernatural subject as one befitting literary treatment it also serves to refract the tale through the lens of contemporaneous detachment, thus evading the charge of ill-informed credulity. In this way, Scott lends to Miller's treatment a valuable ambivalence. Miller is both enabled to raise the subject of the supernatural whilst simultaneously detaching himself from credulity by displaying an informed knowledge of modern, rational counter-positions.

In a review of John Galt's *The Omen* in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1826, Scott articulated a shift in attitude towards the subject of the supernatural. He condemned the educated man's fraternising with 'the superstition of the olden time, which believed in spectres, fairies, and other supernatural apparitions. These airy squadrons', Scott wrote, 'have long been routed, and are banished to the cottage and the nursery.'¹³ In 1830, in response to increasing scientific and medical interest in supernatural apparitions, which an enlightened 'man of sense' could hardly ignore, Scott published his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, signalling to Victorian Scotland that superstition, if it be entertained, was either a figment of the imagination or a symptom of sickness. When Miller recalled, in his 1854 autobiography, the powerful memory of the apparition that appeared to him at the time of his father's death, he was therefore careful to counterpoint his tale with scholarly analysis. The passage reads:

I communicate the story, as it lies fixed in my memory, without attempting to explain it. The supposed apparition may have been merely an affectation of the eye, of the nature described by Sir Walter Scott in his 'Demonology', and Sir David Brewster in his 'Natural Magic.' But if so, the affectation was one of which I experienced no after return; and its coincidence, in the case, with the probable time of my father's death, seems at least curious. (*S&S*, 23-24)

¹³ Walter Scott, review in *Blackwood's Magazine*, 1826, quoted in Douglas Gifford, *James Hogg*, p. 125.

Miller is equivocal. He both attempts to make sense of the incident by reference to modern post-Enlightenment interpretations and scientific rationale and, at the same time, wishes to leave the matter indeterminate, ‘*without attempting to explain it*’, (my emphasis) a communication beyond the rational which is neither fathomable nor resolvable. Such ambiguity wrought a powerful tension in Miller’s writing and he utilised the shifting cultural values he found in Scott to counterpoint the negotiation of one of the most powerful themes of his work.

Scott was not Miller’s only model of authority however. Shortland counts Pope, Gray, Macaulay and Milton among Miller’s idiomatic influences. Indeed Miller’s literary voice did experiment with mimetic idioms. At different points in his writing he adopts Scott and Byron’s Gothic and Romance elements,¹⁴ the sonorous lyricism of Wordsworth and the English Romantic poets¹⁵, Ossianic invocations¹⁶ and Carlylean declamation.¹⁷ His most fundamental influences, however, are those of eighteenth-century Augustans: Swift, Addison, Pope, Fielding, Johnson and Goldsmith.¹⁸ In one of Miller’s *Witness* essays he stated his preference for the great

¹⁴ Miller invokes sublime nature in a number of his prose descriptions as here in *My Schools and Schoolmasters*: ‘The sun had sunk behind the precipices, and all was gloom along their bases, and double gloom in their caves; but their rugged brows still caught the glare of evening.’ (p. 76)

¹⁵ One of Miller’s typical Romance-style poems reads:

When I goe musing all alone,
Thinking of divers things foreknowne –
When I builde castles in the air,
Voide of sorrow and voide of care,
Pleasing myself with phantasms sweet –
Methinks the time runs very fleet;
All my joys to this are follie;-
None soe sweet as melanchollie. (S&S, p. 187).

Miller was no great poet, but he tried to catch the cadence of popular forms and embellish their themes.

¹⁶ Miller mimicked the Ossianic mood in several of his poems, celebrating ‘That Morven’s land has ever been | A land of valour, worth and song’ (S&S, p. 107).

¹⁷ Miller adopts the Carlylean idiom first in his *First Impressions of England*: ‘that awful inconceivable eternity – God’s past lifetime in its relation to God’s finite creatures – with relation to the Infinite I AM Himself, the indivisible element of the eternal now’ and later: ‘Already have the quick eyes of the child looked abroad upon all the past, and already has it noted why the passing time should be a time of sedulous diligence and expectancy. The work-day week draws fast to its close and to-morrow is the Sabbath!’ (p. 309) In *Schools and Schoolmasters* he proclaims: ‘Noble, upright, self-relying Toil! Who that knows thy solid worth and value should be ashamed of thy hard hands, thy soiled vestments, and thy obscure tasks – thy humble cottage, and hard couch and homely fare!’ (p. 147). See Appendix C for further discussion of Carlyle’s relationship to Miller.

¹⁸ Miller names these writers as his seminal influences in his autobiography, *My Schools and Schoolmasters* pp. 27-29.

intellectual treatises of a past age; the philosophical and historical treatises of Rousseau, Hume, Gibbon and Johnson¹⁹ over the contemporary fashion for periodical and novel writing. Through his invocation of Romantic and Augustan models Miller can be seen to mediate both Enlightenment values and Romanticism's reply to these, a subject considered at greater length in the following chapter. Miller had read the Enlightenment philosophers, Locke, Voltaire, Hume, Rousseau, Burke and Smith with varying degrees of approval. He was critical of the religious scepticism manifest in the writings of Voltaire and Hume although he admired the latter's histories alongside those of Edward Gibbon, who had been so critical of Christianity in his history of the Roman Empire. Philosophically, it was largely to the common sense reply to Humean scepticism, with its allowance for an agnostic human nescience, that Miller adhered. Nevertheless, the impact of Enlightenment scepticism was profound, both in its material interrogation of the Christian faith and in its derogation of outmoded tradition and credulous superstition. The appeal to Augustan models could potentially lend Miller's works, which often lingered on the subjects of the religious (and folkloric) supernatural, a crucial association with the values of rational, objective critique propagated in eighteenth-century thought.

For this reason Miller's relationship to the seventeenth-century philosopher, Francis Bacon, is significant. As with Scott, Miller repeatedly invokes Bacon in his writing.²⁰ Philosophically, Miller was placed in a difficult position. With the evidences of science encroaching upon the foundations of Christian faith, contemporary philosophy was increasingly moving towards Hume's egocentric subjectivity. Miller

¹⁹ Hugh Miller, 'Our Novel Literature' (*The Witness*, 12 January 1856). Here Miller favourably compares the 'prodigious influence' of the 'great works' of the former century with the 'piecemeal publication' of contemporary newspapers and the dubious morality of the novel.

²⁰ Bacon is cited throughout Miller's writing; in *Scenes and Legends* p. 1, in *First Impressions of England* p. 335, in *Cruise of the Betsey* pp. 40, 215, in *The Testimony of the Rocks* pp. 69, 224, 301, 377, in *Footprints of the Creator* pp. 133, 298 in *My Schools and Schoolmasters* pp. 151, 231, 452.

regarded Hume as an infidel²¹ – he had no patience for philosophy that did not make room for God just as he had no patience for theologians who refused the truths of science. In Francis Bacon, a scientist and philosopher, Miller found the marriage of profound Christian faith and rigorous logic. Credited as the founder of the modern inductive method, Bacon believed that reason could show the existence of God. As Bertrand Russell has recorded in his *History of Western Philosophy*:

He held that the triumph of faith is greatest when to the unaided reason a dogma appears most absurd. Philosophy, however, should depend only on reason. He was thus an advocate of the doctrine of "double truth," that of reason and that of revelation.²²

Virgil K. Whitaker, writing on Bacon's own relationship to the intellectual milieu of his time, stresses the fact that Bacon did not depart from his contemporaries in the seventeenth century so far as to advocate atheism.

No one can really understand Bacon without sympathy for the man or capacity to respond to the evangelical fervour which is so large a part of his call to the service of mankind [...] Many passages, and especially the great prayer which ends the Plan of the Work prefixed to the *Novum Organum*, shows that Bacon was, in his own way, a profoundly religious man. Ellis, in his preface, states the case exactly in saying that Bacon "declared with all the weight of his authority and of his eloquence that the true end of knowledge is the glory of the Creator and the relief of man's estate".²³

Although there is little direct evidence of Bacon's doctrinal views, it is clear from his writing that he was a fideist - not in the narrow sense of one who believes that man is saved by faith alone but in the larger derived meaning of one who separated the

²¹ In a *Witness* article of 1840, Miller described Hume as 'at once the shrewdest infidel that ever opposed the truth and the ablest historian that ever perverted it'. ('Dr Thomas McCrie', *The Witness*, 27 June 1840). For a further discussion of Miller's religious opposition to Humean scepticism see Chapter 11.

²² Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy and its Connection with Social and Political Circumstances from the earliest Times to the Present Day*, 3rd edn, (London: Routledge, 1955) p. 527.

²³ Virgil K. Whitaker, *Francis Bacon's Intellectual Milieu* A Paper delivered at the Clark Library, 18 November 1961, celebrating the 400th anniversary of Bacon's birth (California: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1962) p. 22.

problem of salvation from that of man's participation in the knowledge and affairs of the world: 'This likewise I humbly pray, that things human may not interfere with things divine [...] that the understanding may give to faith that which is faith's'.²⁴ He charges those who try 'to deduce the truth of the Christian religion from the principles of philosophers' with 'disparaging things divine by mingling them with things human'²⁵, 'And therefore it were a vain labour to attempt to adapt the heavenly mysteries of religion to our reason.'²⁶ Miller, deeply versed in Bacon's writings as he was, would have been aware of the biblical emphasis in Bacon's writing. And significantly, Bacon's own debt to Genesis²⁷ was an authority which Miller invoked in his own defences of Creationist geology.²⁸

Bacon's name, like Walter Scott's, runs throughout the corpus of Miller's writing as the litmus test of rational validity. Bacon's authority as a scientist had been

²⁴ Francis Bacon, *The Works of Francis Bacon, Baron of Verulam, Viscount St Alban, and Lord High Chancellor of England*, ed. by James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath, 7 vols ([n. p.], Longman and Simpkin etc., 1857-1859), IV, 20.

²⁵ Francis Bacon *Novum Organum* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1885), p. lxxxix.

²⁶ Francis Bacon *De Augmentis* 3 vols (London: J. F. Dove, 1828), III, p. v.

²⁷ As Professor Benjamin Farrington in his chapter 'Out With Aristotle And In With The Bible' in his study *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1964), has observed, 'it must be remembered that the supreme masterpiece, *The Great Instauration*, is explicitly named with reference to the divine promise in Genesis of dominion over all creatures, and that the speculative type of philosophy derived from the Greeks is taken as the supreme example of the sin of pride, the occasion of the Fall, and therefore rightly cursed with barrenness. It is Bacon himself who insists that the heart of the meaning is biblical.' p. 22.

²⁸ In *Testimony of the Rocks* (1857) Miller writes, 'About an age previous to the times of Terretine, the danger of "corrupting philosophy through an intermixed divinity" was admirably shown by Bacon in his 'Novum Organum,' and the line indicated was exactly what we now find was laid down of old with such precision in Scripture. "To deify error and to adore vain things", said the great philosopher, "may well be accounted the plague of the understanding. Some modern men, guilty of much levity, have so indulged this vanity, that they have essayed to find natural philosophy in the first chapters of Genesis, the Book of Job, and other places of holy writ, seeking the living among the dead. Now this vanity is so much the more to be checked and restrained because, by unadvised mixture of divine and human things, not only a phantastical philosophy is produced, but also a heretical religion. Therefore, it is safe to give unto Faith, with a sober mind, the things that are Faith's." The passage, partially quoted, has been not unfrequently [sic] misapplied, as if it bore, not against theologians such as Terretine and the Franciscans, but against theologians such as Chalmers, Dr Bird Sommer and Dr Pye Smith, - not against men who derive false science from Scripture, into which God never introduced natural science of any kind, but against the men who having sought and acquired their science where it is alone to be found, have striven to bring Scripture, in the misinterpreted passages, into harmony with its findings. Taken as a whole, however, its meaning is obvious. It is the men who have ' essayed to find natural philosophy ' positively revealed in Genesis and the other sacred books, - not the men who have merely shown that there is nothing in Scripture which conflicts with the natural philosophy legitimately found elsewhere,- that are obnoxious

established, yet the fact that he left room for the possibilities of a spiritual faith meant that he was an ideal representative for the validity of the co-existence of the material and immaterial. As such, Miller could utilise Bacon as a credible counterbalance to his more 'intangible' considerations. In *Scenes and Legends*, ostensibly a history of folklore, but one which contains a proliferation of supernatural tales, Miller invokes Bacon in order to lend a sanctioned voice to his discussion of superstitious belief. The introductory chapter, as so often in Miller's writing, sets up a binary model.

Extremes may meet in the intellectual, as certainly as in the moral world [...] my greatest benefactors have been the philosophic Bacon and an ignorant old woman, who, of all the books ever written, was acquainted with only the bible. (*S&L*, 1)

Scenes and Legends is concerned to preserve a rich vein of Scotland's traditional values, folklore and belief. Yet his 'history' is tempered by a pragmatic desire to educate beyond fallacious and credulous modes of thinking. Thus the two poles of influence, 'the old woman' (traditional wisdom) and 'the philosophic Bacon' (cultured learning) are linked in this work so that Miller is enabled to mediate the values of a traditional *and* an enlightened Scotland. Throughout his work Miller repeatedly invokes the name of the venerated philosopher in this way in order to call forth the principles of rationality, balance and logic by which he can 'earth' his interest in the intuitive and the ethereal.

As a counter to the utilisation of established and 'enlightened' models, Miller makes extensive reference to working artists and self-made men whose voices are rather more peripheral, who spoke out against authority and represented the values of self-assertion and challenge. If Scott stands as the reigning figure of the established *literati*, then it is

to the censure conveyed in the remark. It is they only, and not the others, that are '*phantastical*' in their

the iconic figure of Robert Burns who represents the opposite voice of traditional and non-establishment values. Crucially, this was not an antagonism of literal relationships. Burns was not directly hostile to the *literati*, nor they to him. But certainly, from the nineteenth century onwards literary iconography served to position them at extremes, extremity and simplification being, in part, the function of the icon in reducing the complexity of individual figures to their ideological symbol. Just as Scott's name came to be emblematic of the post-enlightened 'man of sense' and the literary ideals of Romanticism so too did Burns become symbolic of a whole corpus of ideological values. And the values with which Burns is associated are ones with which Miller is intimately concerned; traditional community, pre-Enlightened Scotland, the popular voice and the position of the artisan writer. While contemporary critics have identified the prevalence of Scott in Miller's writing, few have recognised the profound ideological importance of Burns. Dorson has noted the recurrence of Scott in Miller's autobiography, yet far more prevalent in *My Schools and Schoolmasters* are the countless invocations of Burns. Quite apart from the numerous references to his life and poetry in the book, Burns is quoted directly at the opening to seven of the autobiography's chapters, notably those dealing with patriotism (Ch. 3,14), poetry and the struggle of the working writer (Ch. 10, 19, 20), the relationship between man and nature (Ch. 18) and radical politics (Ch. 21). His overt presence in the autobiography itself is significant. It lends to Miller's own self-presentation, as a working man writing on behalf of the people, the endorsement of the archetypal working-class Scots poet. Whether Burns deserves this accolade or not is irrelevant: what is important is that Burns evoked these values and Miller utilises the model of Burns in order to align himself to them.

The model of the working writer and self-made man abounds in Miller's work. His stories repeatedly take as their subject the lives of independent working men: tales of heroic self-sustenance as in 'Donald Millar's Wars With the Sea' (*S&L*, 31-35), of academic men raised from humble beginnings as in 'Dr Hossack' (*S&L*, 410-413), of heroic soldiers born from gypsy stock as in 'Bill Whyte' (*T&S*, 206-242) and countless tributes to intelligent tradesmen, unrecognised artists and local heroes such as William Ross, Isobel McKenzie, Alexander Wright, Donald Roy, the Reverend Stewart and others recorded in *My Schools and Schoolmasters*. In his literary appreciation, Miller tended to identify with the *experience* of the writer and the conditions of his life. In *First Impressions of England and Its People*, Miller draws a deeply sympathetic portrait of the English poet, John Cowper, who suffered from severe bouts of depression throughout his literary career. Miller himself had struggled with depression throughout his life²⁹ and there is clearly an emotional identification with the English poet which goes beyond literary appreciation.³⁰ Yet more than this, Miller's valuation of Cowper extends to ideological identification, and he praises the Evangelical curate in *First Impressions* for his acknowledgement of the symbiosis of God and science.

This type of empathetic treatment is typical of Miller's appreciation of literary figures. In the same way, Miller's lengthy consideration of the achievements of William Shenstone acknowledges that England had produced many better poets, but his interest in Shenstone lies in his identification with the poet's obvious love of nature. For Miller, shared values are as significant as literary importance. Nevertheless, what appears to limit Shenstone's literary greatness, according to Miller, was that he was

²⁹ In *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, Miller recalled how he 'became subject, too, to frequent fits of extreme depression of spirits, which took almost the form of a walking sleep', and which provoked a morbid preoccupation with the event of his own death. Miller concedes, in his recollections, that these depressions were to recur later in life, 'when my health failed for a time under over-exertion of another kind' and he suffered 'renewed experience of the fits of walking sleep' (*S&S*, 149).

³⁰ Lydia related to Bayne that Miller read aloud Cowper's tragic poem, *The Castaway*, on the evening of his suicide in 1856.

'too lacking in hardship and forlorn amongst his amusements' (*FI*, 164). The experience of hardship is, for Miller, fundamental to the attainment of great art. Thus Miller concludes that in the eighteenth century three other poets, Cowper, Crabbe and Burns, constituted a 'literary revolution' in British poetry. And what links these three is their hardship, their common 'exile from the world of letters'. Crabbe was self-taught and lived in 'an obscure fishing village on the coast of Suffolk', observes Miller, while Burns was 'educated in the same style and degree [...] equally secluded [...] in the bleak farm of Mossgiel' (*FI*, 270). Hence what Thomas Brown, in 1858, noted in his analysis of Miller's 'hero worship,' as his generally 'genuinely brotherly and humane sympathy'³¹ for figures such as Burns and Shakespeare is an aspect of Miller's specific identification with self-made men. It was not a simple humanitarianism that caused Miller to sympathise with such figures, but a specific attitude of empathy in regarding the sufferings and neglect of self-made writers, that was quite in contrast to his deferential appreciation of established literary figures. Just as Miller saw Burns as a working artist exiled from his art, so too he saw Shakespeare as the son of a tradesman, Henry Kirke-White as 'the poor clerk of Nottingham',³² Bunyan as the son of a tinker and Robert Fergusson as a frustrated legal clerk. In *First Impressions*, Miller concludes: 'Every great writer in the department in which he achieves greatness, whether he be a learned Milton or an unlearned Burns, is self-taught.' (*FI*, 235). In this, Miller is rejecting a literature of superficial adornment and frivolous refinement, advocating a school of writers shaped by integrity and self-reliance. His own writing repeatedly praises the names of those working writers whom he perceives the literary canon to have neglected; Robert Tannahill, John Clare, William Thom, the Bethune brothers of Forres, Alexander Somerville, author of *The Autobiography of A Working*

³¹ Thomas Brown, *Labour and Triumph*, p. 236.

³² Hugh Miller, *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, p. 490.

Man (1848), as well as the talent of ‘tradesmen’ such as Allan Cunningham and James Hogg. This was the school of writers to which Miller felt himself to belong.³³ And for Miller, it was as much their struggle as their art that made them great men.

Two pieces of writing in particular illustrate Miller’s profound identification with working writers. In the early 1830s, as Miller was embarking on a career in prose writing, he composed two semi-fictional biographies, ‘Recollections of Ferguson’ [sic] and ‘Recollections of Burns’.³⁴ The stories are connected by a shared narrator, a Mr Lindsay, who records his intermittent friendship with the two poets, providing a pretext for the exploration of the writers’ literary and political values and their treatment at the hands of the *literati*. The stories are significant more for their emotional identification than for their craft. The characterisation of Fergusson and Burns is, in fact, rather weak – Miller is really only interested in his fictional subjects as ideological figures. His stories are concerned instead to express, firstly, the values which Fergusson and Burns represent and, secondly, the injustice and suffering of their neglect at the hands of the *literati*. The portrayal of the two poets has indeed little to differentiate them. While it may be relatively accurate to depict Fergusson as a sensitive and introverted man, Burns too is drawn as a somewhat polished, well-spoken young man of a ponderous nature, perhaps more reflective of Miller’s own character than either of his individual subjects. Indeed, Lydia Miller in her (somewhat critically reserved) preface to the book observed, ‘Some may hold that he [Burns] is too like Hugh Miller himself, too

³³ In classifying a ‘school’ of working-class writers to which he felt himself to belong, Miller named several working-men writers of his own times. If Burns was to represent the iconic model of the working man’s voice, then, in the nineteenth-century, Miller also identified the literary talent of Allan Ramsay (1685 – 1758), Robert Fergusson (1750 – 1774), Robert Tannahill (1774 – 1810), Alexander Wilson (1776 – 1813), Allan Cunningham (1784 – 1832), William Thom (1798 – 1843), Robert Chambers (1802 – 1871) and the brothers Bethune, Alexander (1804 – 1843) and John (1811 – 1839). Space does not allow me here to offer a full consideration of these writers and their works. I refer the interested reader to Appendix C, ‘The Anxiety of the Autodidact’, where I explore the particular complexities of the humble-born writer and autodidactic voice.

³⁴ Curiously, Miller mis-spelt Fergusson’s name in the title of his fictional biography. Considering Miller’s great admiration for the poet, it is worth noting that this particular mis-spelling re-occurs

philosophic in idea, and too pure in sentiment.’³⁵ Lydia’s preface is in many ways as revealing as the stories themselves – her comments are extremely perceptive as to the motives of her husband’s work. In these stories, Miller is undoubtedly projecting his own experience into his depiction of the poets’ lives, and he is less concerned to enquire into the specific character of his subjects than to convey his concern for the conditions that shape and limit the experience of the working artist. Lydia concedes that:

In [these stories] there are, I think glimpses into his [Miller’s] own life, such as he, with most men of reserved and dignified character, would chose rather to personify in another than to make a parade of in their own person, when coming forward avowedly to write of themselves.³⁶

Her words suggest that these fictional biographies perhaps offer greater insight into the interior world of Hugh Miller than his own autobiographical depictions. Fergusson and Burns, writers of humble circumstance, were writers concerned with the conditions of everyday Scottish life: Holy Fairs, discussions in Edinburgh pubs, the rights of the people to the land, class politics, religious hypocrisy and Scots tradition are the models for Miller’s concern with the self-expression of working men and the importance of working writers. In ‘The People: Their Own Best Portrait Painters’³⁷ and ‘Literature of the People,’³⁸ Miller argues that a truthful representation of the values and experiences of Scotland’s working communities could only be achieved by ‘the people’ themselves. The fact that Robert Fergusson never achieved critical acclaim and died alone in an Edinburgh asylum, and that Burns was condemned for his outspoken views and, at least to Miller, never achieved the recognition that he deserved, epitomises for Miller the

sporadically throughout Miller’s writing. Both stories were published posthumously in *Tales and Sketches*.

³⁵ Lydia Miller, ‘Preface’ to *Tales and Sketches*, p. vii.

³⁶ Lydia Miller, ‘Preface’ to *Tales and Sketches*, p. vi.

³⁷ Hugh Miller, ‘The People: Their Own Best Portrait Painters’ (*The Witness*, 5 December 1849).

³⁸ Hugh Miller, ‘The Literature of the People’ (*The Witness*, 27 October 1849).

polarisation of society and literature as he himself experienced it in the nineteenth century. Through his 'Recollections,' Miller offers to these writers his attempt to vocalise their position in respect to politics, church and state. But equally importantly, Miller is concerned with the personal experience of the neglected poets. Lydia's observation also suggests that through fiction Miller was able to offer a more truthful reflection of his own experience as a working writer. There is a spirit of resilience that characterises Miller's self-portrayal in *My Schools and Schoolmasters* while, in contrast, a mood of suffering and frustration pervades Miller's fictional portrayals of the working artist. In the autobiography, Miller perhaps felt the necessity to offer a positive, self-vindicating depiction of his non-establishment 'education.' In fiction, he has license to explore the emotional experience of the marginalised writer. In 'Recollections of Ferguson,' Miller's sensitive protagonist admonishes the narrator, Mr Lindsay:

Try and realise the feelings of one whose mind is like a broken harp, - all the medium tones gone and only the higher and lower left; of one too whose circumstances seem of a piece with his mind, who can enjoy the exercise of his better powers, and yet can only live by the monotonous drudgery of copying page after page in a clerk's office; of one who is either continually groping his way amid a chill melancholy fog of nervous depression, or carried headlong by a wild gaiety to all which his better judgement would instruct him to avoid; of one who, when he indulges most in the pride of superior intellect, cannot away with the thought that the intellect is on the verge of breaking up. ('Recollections of Ferguson,' *T&S*, 32-3)

It is no coincidence that Fergusson's words recall Miller's own literary insecurity and despondency, as recorded in his private letters, and Miller must certainly have lent his own experiences of depression and mental instability to the pathetic portrait of the dying Robert Fergusson. The depiction of Burns, on the other hand, displays a characteristic attitude of defiance. Railing against the Edinburgh *literati*, Burns cries:

Pitiful little insects of an hour! What is their notice to me! But I bear a heart, Mr Lindsay, that can feel the pain of treatment so unworthy; and I must confess it moves me [...] Heaven help me! I am miserably unfitted to struggle with even the natural evils of existence; how much more so when these are multiplied and exaggerated by the proud, capricious inhumanity of man. ('Recollections of Burns,' *T&S*, 114)

It is tempting to read these two depictions as the alternate sides of Miller's own nature. He shared both the self-doubt and mental instability of his fictional Fergusson and the defiance and outrage depicted in his characterisation of Burns. Ultimately, however, Miller's chief identification lay with Robert Burns. The portrayal of Fergusson lays testimony to the injustice and waste of the neglected working artist, just as Miller had sought to bear testimony to the neglected and pitifully short life of his closest friend, the painter William Ross. Yet it is Burns, in his spirit of insubordination and in his role as the people's poet that provided the seminal icon for Miller's ideological affiliation. Of his identification with Burns, Lydia avows that:

Unquestionably my husband had a very strong sympathy with many points in the character of Burns. His thorough integrity, - his noble independence, which disdained to place his honest opinions at the mercy of any man or set of men, - his refusal to barter his avowal of the worth and dignity of man for the smiles and patronage of the great.³⁹

Her words make clear the importance of Burns to Miller. Neither just as poet, nor as a great man, but as an icon of the values of independence and ideological integrity did Burns function as a model to Hugh Miller. Just as Burns features as a prefix to several of Miller's autobiographical depictions, his projected interpretation of Burns's life sets up an identification between the celebrated poet and that of Miller himself as struggling, yet fiercely independent, working writers.

Miller's utilisation of the figure of Burns is notably different from his treatment of Scott. While Miller relates to the Burnsian persona as friend, compatriot, equal, Scott

is elevated to a position of detached authority: judge, arbitrator, figurehead. In *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, Miller recalled how he had 'several times lingered in Castle Street of a Saturday evening opposite the house of Sir Walter Scott, in the hope of catching a glimpse of that great writer and genial man, but had never been successful'. (S&S, 340) Such a man could never be the subject of the projected friendships depicted in Miller's fictional biographies. Clearly, Miller's relationship to Scott and the *literati* is one of aspiration to Burns and the working writer it is one of empathy. In his invocations to figures such as Scott and Bacon Miller sought to invoke a position of authority. These writers provided established models for the integration of enlightenment rationalism alongside religious belief and folkloric usage. Yet Miller's identification lay, ultimately, with the working voice. The figure of Robert Burns offers a critical union of traditional, popular values alongside literary status. Miller's own mediation of ideological allies sought to achieve a similar synthesis by attaining an authoritative literary idiom capable of expressing the concerns of the working people and the integrity of the peripheral voice.

³⁹ Lydia Miller, 'Preface,' *Tales and Sketches*, p. viii.

Part Two: The Search for A Voice

‘What obsesses a writer starting out on a lifetime’s work is the panic stricken search for a voice of his own’

John Mortimer, *Clinging to the Wreckage*

Part II: The Search for a Voice

In Part I Miller's attempts to fashion an authoritative literary persona, via the semiotics of dress and manner, through autobiographical self-projection and by means of the inter-textual invocation of other literary figures, have been examined. Part II explores Miller's search for literary voice. Miller's lack of confidence in his initial creative projects between 1829 and 1835 suggests a degree of literary insecurity perhaps arising from the compromised status of the self-taught working-class writer. Yet the production of a vast and eclectic corpus of published and printed works suggest that Miller did eventually attain considerable literary authority. His rapid movement across genres (from the poetic through short fiction and public letter to journalistic essay, scientific exposition and autobiography) and between various discourses (philosophical, scientific, political and theological), moreover, suggests the achievement of an increasingly confident literary voice. Within Miller's heterogeneous body of work a certain degree of ideological ambiguity (perhaps even anxiety) with regard to his feelings about the confrontation of traditional and contemporary thought persists. Nevertheless, Miller's work as a whole issues a remarkably bold and forward-thinking gesture towards the integration of art and labour, the elite and the popular, and the authoritative and the subversive amidst a radically synthetic body of scientific, religious and social thought.

Chapter Five:

Miller and the Muse

The Anxiety of the Autodidact

Just as Miller had invoked iconic literary figures to aid the establishment of a credible public persona, so too does he rely on established models in his framing of a literary voice. His idiomatic choices demonstrate his adherence to various literary values from the classical Augustan idiom of the previous century and the fashionable Romanticism of James Macpherson and the English Romantics to the vernacular model revived by Allan Ramsay and later politicised by Fergusson and Burns. Each of these choices possessed a particular ideological importance and by his mediation of them Miller hoped to adopt a literary voice that could negotiate his own position within the transitional social and cultural values of nineteenth-century Scotland.

In *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) Harold Bloom explores the pervasive anxiety of the writer on first entering into engagement with the authoritative literary tradition. A consciousness of the literary establishment, he argues, informs all acts of writing and is the measure by which the individual artist marks his contribution to literary tradition.

How do men become poets, or to adopt an older phrasing, how is the poetic character incarnated? When a potential poet first discovers (or is discovered by) the dialectic of influence, first discovers poetry as being both external and internal to himself, he begins a process that will end only when he has no more poetry within him [...] Poetic Influence is the sense – amazing, agonising, delighting – of *other poets*, as felt in the depths of the all-but-perfect solipsist, the potentially strong poet. For the poet is condemned to learn his profoundest yearnings through an awareness of *other selves*. The poem is *within* him, yet he experiences the shame and splendour of *being found by* poems, great poems *outside him*.¹

¹ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 25-6.

Bloom's concern with the poetic self leads him to speculate that the profound solipsism that first defines the new poet's search for voice, is quickly and inevitably confronted by the alarming realisation of all the voices of all the poets that have come before him. As Malraux has said, 'Every young man's heart is a graveyard in which are inscribed the names of a thousand dead artists but whose only actual denizens are a few, mighty, often antagonistic ghosts.'² These are the ghosts of the great poets, the tradition-bearers of truth and beauty with whom the beginning poet must now engage. Malraux concludes his reflections with the summary 'from pastiche to style', thus suggesting that the journey of the writer begins with a reliance on his poetic models and proceeds to artistic autonomy. Prior to the eighteenth century, the appeal to authoritative models was an acceptable literary convention. The medieval poets flaunted their skill by invoking the literary styles of their predecessors and as late as the seventeenth century, Ben Jonson described the skill of the poet who is 'able to convert the substance and riches of another poet to his own use'. It was in the Age of Enlightenment that originality, in the modern sense, was first heralded as a creative virtue. The emphasis on Genius and the Sublime meant that writers were now felt to be recipients of a creative intuition beyond 'mere study' and 'correct imitation'. From the Enlightenment onwards, art was expected to demonstrate Inspiration. And thus, Bloom explains, it is the eighteenth century that sees the birth of poetic anxiety. It is for this reason that Bloom speaks of a 'terrible splendour of cultural heritage' and he defines a 'Milton-haunted eighteenth century' and a 'Wordsworth-haunted nineteenth'.³

Bloom's study relates specifically to the psychology of poetic invention. Applied to the cultural and class anxieties experienced by the Scottish autodidact, however, his thesis has a powerful relevance. Culturally speaking, Miller's corpus of

² Andre Malraux, quoted in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 26.

³ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 32.

literary models is a notably British one.⁴ In fact rather than discriminating according to national origin (Scottish/English) Miller instead tends to discriminate writers by their class so that, for example Shakespeare, Bunyan, Ramsay, Cowper, Fergusson, Crabbe, Burns, Bloomfield, Hogg, Henry-Kirke White and John Clare are distinguished by their shared humble origins.⁵ The difficulty for the Scottish writer, by implication of Miller's conception of literary pedigree, was not nationality, as such, but rather the centralising production of regionalism. The impact of the industrial revolution (which produced a movement away from traditional agrarian culture to the increasingly secularised and homogenising industrial cities) and of Enlightenment philosophy (with its sceptical interrogation of credulous traditional beliefs) affected a cultural distancing from traditional, local beliefs. The word parochial, (originally denoting an ecclesiastical district: 'of a parish') first takes the pejorative evaluative meaning of 'limited and narrow character or tendency' during the nineteenth century, in 1847.⁶ It was during this century that localised values and beliefs bearing the marks of superstition and folkloric tradition were increasingly disparaged by sceptical philosophy and exoticised by literary Romanticism. Bloom's study highlights the anxiety of the beginning poet marking an entrance in the world of established literary successors. Yet how much more the anxiety of influence must have been felt by a Scottish autodidact whose intellectual inheritance was shaped by a vernacular culture that did not conform to the authority of establishment belief and whose social status precluded him from an undisputed entry to the literary elite.

⁴ His classification of 'great writers' typically includes the names of Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, Dryden, Swift, Addison, Allan Ramsay, Pope, Fielding, Johnson, Shenston, Smollett, Goldsmith, Cowper, Macpherson, Mackenzie, Fergusson, Chatterton, Crabbe, Burns, Bloomfield, Hogg, Scott, Henry Kirke-White, Byron, John Clare, Shelley, Keats and Wordsworth.

⁵ See for example *First Impressions of England* pp. 228 – 281 and *My Schools and Schoolmasters* p. 490.

Mediating an Idiom: The Augustan and The Romantic

As we have seen in the previous chapter Miller's seminal literary influences were the eighteenth-century Augustans. Several commentators have noted Miller's adoption of the neo-classical idiom. Thomas Brown writes of Miller's style: 'Mingling with the pleasing and innocent prattle of Addison and Steele, might be heard the stinging and waspish satires of Pope, and the savage howl of the Dean of St Patrick's, Jonathan Swift [...] With the wits and humourists [sic] of the eighteenth century, Hugh Miller was quite as familiar as Thackeray [...] Hardly any of his works are wanting in frequent reference to Goldsmith'.⁷ Similarly, W. M. Mackenzie has commented on Miller's style:

Happily Miller left us in no doubt as to his models and standards. He is confessedly of the Augustans, the men of Queen Anne's time, and the prose writers who derived from them [...] He sought his models where every educated Scotsman did till the time of the Carlyle fashion, and was the last noble exponent in a dying mode. When Baron Hume declared that he excelled in "that classical style" with which his contemporaries had lost touch, Hugh modestly explained that he owed the merit "chiefly to accident; to having kept company with the older English writers – the Addisons, Popes and Robertsons of the last century." And he goes on to say, "the tone of these earlier writers I have, I daresay, contrived in some measure to catch."⁸

Miller's biographer and critic, Peter Bayne reflects, 'he could have given us [...] a critico-biographical work on Pope, Addison, and their contemporaries, which might have been unique and superlative of its kind. He knew those men as if he had lived and talked with them. They were the models whose chastened beauties appeared to him more worthy of emulation than the passionate and metaphorical writing in vogue in his

⁶ 'parochial' - 1393, from Anglo-Fr. *parochiel* (1292), from O.Fr. *parochial*, from L.L. *parochialis* "of a parish" (c. 600), from *parochia* (see *parish*). *Parochialism* in the sense of "limited and narrow character or tendency" is first recorded 1847.' (*Online Etymological Dictionary*: www.etymonline.com).

⁷ Thomas Brown, *Labour and Triumph*, pp. 234-5, 267.

⁸ W. M. Mackenzie, *Hugh Miller*, pp. 26 -7.

own day.’⁹ Both Mackenzie’s and Bayne’s words here are significant; not only do they point to the Augustan poets as Miller’s chief literary models, but they also emphasise a self-conscious emulation of the classical idiom. Recalling Michael Shortland’s observation that ‘Miller tried on various literary styles,’¹⁰ it is clear that the Augustans must have represented to Miller literary values to which he aspired in invoking their neo-classical style. Henry A. Beers, in his *A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century* (1899) concedes that the critics of the eighteenth century, with the weight of their literary opinion, created an almost canonical body of endorsed literary works: ‘Three writers of high authority in three successive generations – Dryden, Addison, Johnson – consolidated a body of literary opinion, which may be described, in the main, as classical’.¹¹ At the time when Miller first ventured into poetic composition, during the 1820s, the literary figures of ‘highest authority’ were of the classical idiom. Even Byron and Scott, progenitors of the new literary Romanticism, were adherents to the authority of Augustan literary values.¹² Augustanism appealed to the received wisdom of the antiquities and could thus claim a powerful classical pedigree. Moreover, Augustan literature was informed by the weight of Enlightenment values to which the new literary Romanticism, in its violent reaction against these, had not yet established the authority of its reply. As Miller first ventured into the literary world, his almost slavish emulation of classical Augustan models was intended to furnish the established authority upon which to build his own literary voice.

Poems of a Journeyman Mason, Miller’s first literary publication overtly endeavours to capture the classical idiom. His ‘Dedications’ repeatedly cite Dryden,

⁹ Peter Bayne, II, 134.

¹⁰ Michael Shortland, *Hugh Miller’s Memoir*, p. 37.

¹¹ Henry A. Beers, *The History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1899), p. 50.

Pope or Milton as his inspiration¹³ and his verse forms are typically the elegy, the ode, the epistle and the epic, often adopting the heroic couplet utilised by his Augustan models. In his somewhat obsequious, imitative use of the formal elements of the eighteenth-century poets, Miller is seeking, crucially, to imbibe the ideological values of the Augustan age, which were important to him in several ways. Firstly, the Augustan world-view bore an important relation to Miller's religious whiggism and his defence of religious beliefs. Secondly, the Augustan humanists regarded the function of art as primarily moral, a valuation which fulfilled Miller's own didactic agenda. Furthermore, the eighteenth-century humanists regarded man as an innately social creature and, in their social critique, rejected solipsistic subjectivism in favour of rational objectivity and moral veracity. Finally, from the Augustan conviction of the depravity and untrustworthiness of man arises the literary ethics of decorum and restraint as well as the philosophical rejection of outmoded tradition, credulous superstition and false idols. This last was especially significant to Miller – in emulating a classical idiom he sought to eschew pejorative associations with the traditional, labouring, background from which he came.¹⁴

¹² See for example, *Byron: Augustan and Romantic* ed. Andrew Rutherford (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990) and Miranda J. Burgess, 'Scott, History and the Augustan Public Sphere', *Studies in Romanticism* 40:1 (2001), pp. 123-35.

¹³ Miller's opening 'Dedication' admits a preference for the lengthy epistles in the style of Dryden while 'Introductory Stanzas' cites the models of Cowper, Henry Kirk-Whyte and Milton. In a Preface to 'The Patriot' Miller expresses his wish that the utilisation of the heroic verse couplets of Dryden and Pope will not illicit unfair comparison. 'Glory – An Ode', Miller explains, is 'attempted in the manner of 'David and Asaph'', 'A Tale of Youth' is prefixed by a quotation from Byron and 'Elegy at Sea' is prefixed by a quotation from Milton. Finally, the closing address 'To the Reader', Miller explains in his autobiography, is 'formed somewhat on the model of the preface of Pope, for I was a great admirer, at the time, of the English written by 'the wits of Queen Anne'' (S&S, 414).

¹⁴ Paul Fussell in his excellent study of Augustan literature, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism: Ethics and Imagery from Swift to Burke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) has warned against the simplistic chronological demarcation of literary and philosophical ethics. Rather than unproblematically viewing the Augustans of the eighteenth century as the proponents of rationalism and the nineteenth-century Romantics as the advocates of feeling and imagination, Fussell suggests that there are two concurrent traditions running through the eighteenth century: that of the 'humanist' or 'ethical' tradition, a tradition running from Swift and Pope and transmitted to Johnson and Reynolds, Gibbon and Burke and a second 'optimistic' or 'expressive' tradition featuring Addison, Steele, James Thomson, Shenston, Goldsmith, Chatterton and Copwer that leads through to the Romantic literature of Blake and Burns. 'Seen in this way the confrontations of these two traditions in the eighteenth century becomes less

With the sceptical philosophy of the Enlightenment Christianity had been fundamentally challenged. Voltaire made his crusade against the Christian God the climax of his career. Hume's sceptical philosophy destroyed the traditional defence that Creation could demonstrate the existence of God. French and English Deism argued that a belief in supernatural forces were merely the remnants of primitive and credulous ignorance. And the arch-infidel Edward Gibbon concluded that Christianity was merely a show of rituals to entertain the populace whilst serving the worldly and pragmatic aims of the elite. Nevertheless, few intellectuals of the Enlightenment wanted to replace religion with out and out disbelief. Rather it was the intention of the Enlightenment to reform religion by reason. Most influential in this respect was Locke's essay, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), which argued that a belief in an omnipotent Creator was neither inconsistent with reason nor experience. There emerged in the eighteenth-century a vindication of a practical common-sense religion, such as that advocated by Joseph Addison in his Psalm 19 or Alexander Pope's *Universal Prayer* (1738). Miller's poetry could therefore invoke the maxims of Christian faith with impunity. The religious sentiments of *Poems of A Journeyman Mason* have none of the Evangelical fire, however, that is so evident in Miller's later *Witness* writings in essays such as 'The Vision of A Railroad'.¹⁵ Conforming to the Augustan appeal to decorum and restraint Miller's poems here tend towards a religious sententiousness in which all the passions of man are seen to be resolved by the unwavering assurance of Divine reason, order and protection. The necessity to justify faith by reason prompted Miller

an opposition between 'classicism' and 'romanticism' than a continuation clear through the century of the old Renaissance battle of the Ancients and Moderns.' (p.25)

Miller, typically, draws from both traditions. From the Augustan humanists he imbibes the ethical values of human fallibility and the moral function of art. However, Miller has his belief in the validity of the idea of progress in common with the latter expressive tradition, which was also generally more friendly to religious evangelism (regarded by the humanist tradition as a dangerously mechanistic determinism, depriving man of the moral imperatives of free will and choice).

¹⁵ Hugh Miller, 'The Vision of A Railroad' (*The Witness*, 4 March, 1843). This essay is discussed in Chapter 7.

on several occasions to emphasise the logic of his faith. More than once he stresses the perfect equation between Christian doctrine and man's nature in that Christ is both man, susceptible to the sufferings of human kind, and Deity, to which human nature could aspire.¹⁶

Indeed much of Miller's intellectual broadmindedness and his emphasis on social reform suggest the Christian humanism of the Renaissance, a humanism that has much in common with the ethical Augustan tradition.¹⁷ The classical idiom therefore facilitated Miller's preference for (religious) didactic moralising. Augustan literature followed the classical commonplace that the purpose of literature is to teach, but to instruct through the agency of aesthetic pleasure. It is this association of the aesthetic and the didactic that informs the Augustan assumption that ethics and expression are closely allied. Good style, as Johnson would attest in his *The Lives of the English Poets* (1779 – 1781), was regarded as a warranty of good morals. Miller's utilisation of the classical idiom meant that he could ally himself with a style, in the words of Johnson, 'familiar but not coarse'¹⁸ and eschew associations with the crudity of a parochial, labouring life by allying himself with the morally elevated classical aesthetic.

Contrary to the popular belief that the Augustan poets were slavish adherents to the authority of 'reason', writers such as Johnson and Swift actually argued that man succumbs only to delusion and pride in his belief that he is entirely 'rational'. To Swift

¹⁶ In his essay, 'A True Story of the Life of A Scotch Merchant of the Eighteenth Century,' commissioned for the Forsyth family of Cromarty, Miller included this personal reflection on the 'true religion' of Christianity: 'It is Christianity alone which unites the popularity of the one class with the rationality, and more than the purity of the other, -that gives to the Deity, as man, his strong hold on the human affections, and restores to him, in his abstract character of the Father of all, the homage of understanding.' (*T&S*, 370) This perspective is echoed in *First Impressions of England and My Schools and Schoolmasters*. Bayne, in the Preface to his collection of Miller's religious *Witness* essays, describes Miller's faith as 'a faith deliberately ratified by his intellect'. (*The Headship of Christ and the Rights of the Christian People*, ed. by Peter Bayne, (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1870), p. xi.

¹⁷ See footnote 15. Fussell notes that 'the humanist code constitutes a more or less diminished and secularised version of the Christian humanism of the English Renaissance, although the Christian element in eighteenth-century humanism is very hard to measure.' (p. 11).

¹⁸ Samuel Johnson, 'Life of Joseph Addison', *Lives of the English Poets* ed. by Peter Cunningham 6 vols (London: John Murray, 1854), II, 119 – 182.

man is *capax rationis* - capable, with great effort, of being rational, but makes the greatest mistake when he considers himself *animal rationale* – a creature already reasonable and requiring no redemption through self-distrust. In fact Pope, Swift and Johnson actually rejected what they regarded as the sterile rationalism of Descartes and Hume. The Augustans maintained a suspicion of solitary subjectivity and instead advocated an ethical world in which human nature is fixed, stable and objectively knowable in a world comprehensible by verifiable phenomena - rather than (as the Romantics would later have it) a world subjectively apprehensible only to the unique individual. Indeed the function of social satire, so much a feature of the writings of Swift, Addison and Steele was regarded as an innately moral aesthetic serving to remind man of his inherent degeneracy and the erroneous nature of arrogant self-reliance. The rejection of Humean subjectivity would have pleased Miller (who rejected the philosopher's material scepticism) but more importantly, Miller in developing an increasingly commanding social critique, would borrow from the tangible, objective moral assurance of his satirical eighteenth-century models.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Miller's appeal to the Augustan model facilitated a crucial alliance with a degree of educated scepticism regarding supernatural belief. While his work recurrently returns to the subject of the supernatural, the eerie and bizarre, Miller never fully admits or explains his own position regarding the validity of superstitious beliefs. As David Alston has noted in his study of Miller's folk tales, 'The general question of the truth of omens, foretelling, even apparitions is seldom addressed'.¹⁹ In this, Miller was perhaps heeding the advice of Addison, who, speaking on the question of the immaterial world in the *Spectator*, had written that:

¹⁹ David Alston, 'The Fallen Meteor: Hugh Miller and Local Tradition' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above), pp. 206 - 229 (p. 217).

There are some opinions in which a man should stand neuter, without engaging his assent to one side or the other [...] When I consider the question, whether there are such persons in the world as those we call witches? My mind is divided between the two opposite opinions; or rather (to speak my thoughts freely) I believe in general that there is, and has been such a thing a witchcraft; but at the same time can give no credit to any particular instance of it.²⁰

Pope is more outspoken. In his *Essay on Man* (1732 –34) he makes Superstition the travesty of true religion, an ignorant and vain projection of man's passions upon the heavens: 'Fear made her devils, and weak Hope her Gods'.²¹ In the *Essay* superstition is simply the product of an 'untutored mind'. Jonathon Swift's writing marks a subtle yet critical analysis of the dangers of 'enthusiasm' and credulous fanaticism. Hume argued that superstitious devotion to all gods fashioned in man's imagination produced only intolerance and perpetuated ignorance. Gibbon warned that without educated scepticism 'the blind fury of superstition, from every age of the world, and from every corner of the globe, will invade us naked and unarmed'.²² With greater moderation Boswell wrote of Johnson's beliefs: 'He was prone to superstition, but not to credulity. Though his imagination might incline him to a belief in the marvellous and the mysterious, his vigorous reason examined the evidence with jealousy.'²³ This is most likely the position of aesthetic indulgence combined with objective scrutiny that Miller wished to strike. Moreover, the Romantic revival of interest in the supernatural gave a pretext to Miller's own fascination with the otherworldly. (We have seen, for example, how Miller utilised the Romantic fiction of Walter Scott as an alibi for his inclusion of supernatural subjects). In divulging his extensive knowledge of superstitious material,

²⁰ Joseph Addison, *Spectator* No. 117 (14 July 1711) quoted in Coleman O. Parsons, *Witchcraft and Demonology in the Fiction of Walter Scott* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), p. 1.

²¹ Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, ed. by Maynard Mack (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1950) Epistle II, ll. 99.

²² Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. by J. B. Bury 6 vols (London: Methuen, 1898 - 1901), I, 238.

²³ James Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson* ed. by G.B. Hill and L.F. Powell 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934 – 64), IV, 276.

Miller could thus appeal to the popular taste for the supernatural in his own times whilst his utilisation of the classical literary idiom imputed a detached objectivity.

While *Poems of A Journeyman Mason* demonstrates an overall adherence to the principles of the neo-classicists, there are elements of popular Romance at work in the poetry too. Brown's analysis of Miller's literary influences detects this:

As might have been anticipated, he who had so completely mastered the great novelists and essayists of the eighteenth century, had scanned with an eye scarcely less keen, if, perhaps, a little less loving, the great novelists of our own age.²⁴

Miller's poetry is not without the sublime imaginings of the Romantics, a fact which Bayne recognised in his analysis of one of Miller's early verses, remarking that, 'he has learned to sketch in Scott's [...] manner' and that that in Miller's early compositions 'there seems to be an echo from Byron's tales'.²⁵ In the poetic submissions in *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, Miller also cites the influence of James Macpherson's *Ossian* and his writing demonstrates a familiarity with the works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Goethe and Rousseau, as well as Burns.²⁶ Indeed, Miller's own thematic interests have several features in common with Romantic literature. The voyaging narratives of the seventeenth century which inspired the Romantic poets had been a source of fascination to Miller since he had first read them in boyhood, while his preoccupation with melancholy and morbid reflections, the subjects of the outcast and

²⁴ Thomas Brown, *Labour and Triumph*, p. 266.

²⁵ Peter Bayne, *Life of Hugh Miller I*, 30-31.

²⁶ While Scott is referred to throughout *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, Miller's autobiography also discusses the influences of Macpherson's *Ossian*, (pp. 96-7, 107) on his poetry, while the works of other European Romantic writers are mentioned; Wordsworth p. 64, Byron p. 80, Rousseau p. 87, Goethe p. 71, Keats p. 148. Similarly, in his autobiographical letter to Principal Baird, Miller wrote, 'Verse in turn gave place to prose, and prose to a third sort of composition which imitated the style of Macpherson's *Ossian*' ('letter to Baird', p. 10). Miller also makes several references to the Romantic writers in his *Scenes and Legends*: Coleridge p. 476, Henry Mackenzie p. 441, Wordsworth p. 194 and Scott and Burns throughout.

wonderer and the mysteries of the supernatural seem best suited to the emotional temperament of Romanticism.

Miller's writing then, combines the influences of both Romantic and Augustan – like Byron, his style and idiom testifies to an admiration of neo-classical authors while the subject of the writing itself often draws on Romantic themes. Miller's admiration of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), the outstanding example of poetry's evocation of the sublime landscape, may have provided an exemplar for the literary crossover between elements of the classical and Romantic. Burke's identification, in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), of that quality beyond beauty, which lies in images of darkness, solitude and vastness, is everywhere present in Miller's relationship to the natural world and he utilises aspects of the sublime landscape to depict the awe-inspiring nature of Creation in his religious poetry. Milton, moreover, was the one of the first poets to adopt the epic to Biblical narrative and to apply the credentials of the hero to the Christian protagonist.²⁷ The classical epics of Homer and Virgil had long been considered morally edifying in that they exalted the virtues and revealed the dangers of moral weakness. Milton's achievement was in translating the traditional (pagan) didacticism of the epic model into contemporary religious heroic terms. The Christian hero, in Milton's invention, was unlike the solitary and sorrowful traditional Romantic hero. The seventeenth-century Christian hero was not necessarily viewed as eccentric or isolated. While he underwent trial and suffering, his heroism was achieved within himself, as it were, and the ultimate triumph of faith over doubt and temptation could be viewed a personal experience of the ultimate cosmic battle between Good and Evil, between God and Satan. In *Poems of a Journeyman Mason*, Miller repeatedly chooses

²⁷ For a further discussion of this see Burton O. Kurth, *Milton and Christian Heroism: Biblical Epic Themes and Forms in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959).

the seventeenth-century ode and heroic epic over nineteenth-century verse forms such as the lyric and ballad. The epic, in particular, suited his religious and didactic purpose, and the adoption of the Miltonic Christian hero allowed him to transpose his love of the heroic from the merely romantic to the edifying theologic.

Occasionally, however, Miller toyed with Romantic posturing.²⁸ The image of the romantic rustic bard, so completely identified with Burns's example, clearly appealed to the young poet and features in several of his poems. But Miller's poetry is as interested in the patriotic associations of the Burnsian figure as in the solipsistic, and his heroism is more often of the Miltonic kind than of the Byronic. Miller's writing also demonstrates a concern with the outcast and the wanderer, figures that had become the staple heroes in Romantic fiction. David Alston notes that, 'in searching out stories, Miller had an admirable ability to relate to social outcasts, such as the madwoman at Conon and a number of "idiots"'²⁹ - such as 'Poor Danie' and Old Francie who feature in *My Schools and Schoolmasters*. In all probability Miller identified with the marginal position of the social outsider, being himself distanced from his own traditional background through education and ambition and from the literary elite through a relative lack of education and social standing. Miller's treatment of the underdog, whilst sympathetic, betrays little of the dewy-eyed sentimentalism that often beset the fiction of his time. He had experienced too many of the hardships of an underprivileged life to impute a false romanticism onto the lives of the gypsy and the 'idiot boy' and, as his writing corpus evolved, this early romantic impulse towards society's outcasts

²⁸ In his autobiographical letter to Principal Baird, Miller self-consciously offered himself in the role of the solitary Romantic hero. 'I was in the habit of quitting my school companions for the sea-shore, where I would saunter for whole hours, pouring out long, blank-verse effusions (rhime was a discovery of after date) about sea fights, storms, ghosts and desert islands [...] My dreams were of [...] heroes. I have wept over the pages that described their death'. ('letter to Baird', pp. 92-93).

²⁹ David Alston, 'The Fallen Meteor: Hugh Miller and Local Tradition', p. 211.

develops into a mature social agenda concerned with the unwritten stories of the marginalised working classes.

Certainly, Miller's own childhood experiences lent themselves readily to the Romantic imagination. His early confrontation with death had given him a native morbidity and intensity in regarding metaphysical questions and his interest in primitive culture and the supernatural were not merely inspired by the fashions of the time but derived from his own experience of local storytelling and the superstitious inheritance of his ancestors. Indeed, Miller's philosophical approach to the questions of the universe has much of the metaphysical intensity of the Romantic movement. One nineteenth-century critic defined the origin of Romantic feeling as belonging to wonder and a sense of mystery, observing that: 'Moonlight is romantic, as contrasted by daylight,' and speculating that it was 'the influence of the Christian religion, which deepened immensely the mystery of life, suggesting something behind the world of sense'.³⁰ Certainly, the intensity of Miller's religious feeling lends a metaphysical gravity to his writing nowhere present in the Augustan period. Beers observes that:

Queen Anne literature was classical then, in its lack of those elements of mystery and aspiration, which we have found described as of the essence of romanticism. It was emphatically a literature of this world. It ignored all vague emotion, the phenomena of sub-consciousness, 'the electric chain wherewith we are darkly bound', the shadow that rounds man's little life, and fixed its attention only on what it could thoroughly comprehend.³¹

If Miller's religion allowed for the 'immense mystery of life,' then it answered to a feeling within him that had existed in his relationship to the metaphysical universe long before he converted to Christianity some time in 1829. The influence of his Highland mother and the superstitious culture of his community had made an early impact on the young boy's mind. His sense of awe in beholding the natural universe and his persistent

³⁰ Dr F. H. Hedge, *Atlantic Monthly*, 1886, quoted in Henry Beers, p. 11.

³¹ Henry Beers, *A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 42.

desire to unravel her hidden secrets were impulses held since childhood. There is profoundly psychological disclosure in Miller's poetry, a sense in which the depths of the unconscious mind and of the emotions of nostalgia and grief are reached, which invites comparison with the introspective concerns of the Romantics and their obsession with death, grief and lament. Yet Miller's emotional temper is not the intentional subject of his writing and is never displayed on the surface of his works. Rather, it is revealed - sometimes one feels unconsciously - in the recurrent psychological and philosophical concerns of his work. It is tempting to conclude then, that while Miller sought to pierce obscurity by means of the rational intellect, nevertheless his imaginative writing betrays the kind of emotional intensity that preoccupies the writing of the Romantics.

The negotiations of Augustan and Romantic idiom in Miller's writing reveal some of the tensions at work, both in Miller's own ideological disposition and in his developing literary stance. His treatment of Romantic themes was necessarily double-edged. Given that Miller had emerged as a working man from a rural, traditional community, by post-Enlightened standards he was already tainted by association with primitive beliefs and crude intelligence. Romanticism allowed Miller to explore themes intimate to his personal experience and which certainly appealed to the popular imagination of the time. But his association with a literary movement which actually reacted against the authority of Enlightenment values incurred the potential risk of Miller himself appearing credulous and unsophisticated, a danger which, in his own appeal to literary authority, he could little afford. Miller could be certain that, in adopting the idiom and formal style of the eighteenth-century Augustan writers, he would invite favourable criticism at least as to the educated 'good taste' of his style, and avoid the charge of florid excess and extravagance, which an over-enthusiastic

Romantic versifier might invite. Writing in the early 1900s, Mackenzie's appraisal of Miller's literary style acknowledges this. Commenting on Miller's 'middle style' he writes that:

If it never rises to the convoluted sublimity of the older men, [it] never, on the other hand, sinks to the commonplace of colloquialism. It cannot be held that it is a style capable of the effects which have been drawn in modern times from a critical return to more archaic sources; but then on the other hand, it is not, for ordinary purposes, so dangerous a medium, nor does it run a risk of affectation and painful artificiality.³²

Miller's invocation of the Augustan idiom allowed him to temper his inclination towards the mysterious and supernatural sublime with the cool-headed restraint of his eighteenth-century models. His adoption of classical modes could detract from the charge of guileless enthusiasm, while the Augustan appeal to logic and rationality supported Miller's ostensible ambivalence regarding the veracity of provocative immaterial subject matter.

It is perhaps this element of classical reserve that prompted Bayne's conclusion that Miller's poetry 'fell short both in lyrical passion and dramatic sympathy, and his imagination, though powerful, was cold.'³³ Yet given the ideological weight contained in Miller's use of his literary models it is perhaps not surprising that Miller was unable to utilise them with great dexterity. Miller, as we have seen, manifested considerable anxiety regarding his own creative abilities. Not only does Miller appear to experience Bloom's 'anxiety of influence' in producing his first work of literary composition but this is also compounded by his awareness of his own social and cultural shortcomings as a self-taught labouring poet seeking the endorsement of the elite *literati*. Here Miller's strategy of adapting to the persona of the 'peasant poet', (for example in the collection's title and Dedication), was intended to appeal to an established literary

fashion. Several of the poems, discussed later in the chapter, borrow from the vernacular tradition, invoke the popular figure of the rustic bard and reflect upon the neglected merits of traditional Scots culture. Yet Miller's stringent obedience to the poetic models of his literary forefathers, particularly the generic prescription of Augustan literature, produces a poetry that is structurally mimetic and which fails to achieve a distinctive and individual poetic voice. The Augustans themselves did not prize 'originality' as the Romantics did, preferring a literature that adhered to the strict principles (and received wisdom) of classical models. As Paul Fussell puts it the Augustan writer must 'eschew the 'fanciful inventions' which transmit nothing and, at the same time, [...] avoid outright cliché.'³⁴ In this last, Miller's poetry fails. He lacks the inventive capacity to make even the Augustan requisite of 'common truths' fresh and interesting. Instead Miller's mimetic handling of received forms and idioms creates a rigid exterior into which he simply implants his themes. The inelasticity of this approach is perhaps one reason for Miller's inability to stretch the capacities of his themes and ideas, which, although psychologically interesting in subject matter, are too often obscured by the use of stock imagery, diction and emotion.

Poetic Themes

Immediately after *Poems of a Journeyman Mason* went to press, Miller regretted its publication, recognising that his verse lacked the accomplishment which he had earlier believed it to have.³⁵ Yet while Miller's poetry lacks creativity, his poetic themes have

³² W. M. Mackenzie, *Hugh Miller: A Critical Study*, pp. 27-8.

³³ Peter Bayne, *Life of Hugh Miller I*, 238-9.

³⁴ Paul Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism*, p. 61.

³⁵ In a letter to Alexander Finlay in 1836, Miller wrote, 'After returning from Edinburgh I [...] did a very foolish thing. I published a volume of poems. They were mostly juvenile; and I was beguiled into the belief that they had some little merit by the pleasing images and recollections of early life and lost friends which they awakened in my own mind through the influence of the associative faculty. But this sort of merit lay all outside of them, if I may so speak, and existed in relation to the writer alone.' ('Hugh Miller's 1836 Letter to Alexander Finlay' reprinted in Shortland, *Hugh Miller's Memoir*, pp. 235 – 239, p. 237).

significance for the student of his work. Although published in 1829, most of the collection's poems had been written when Miller was just a teenager. As a result, they are, undoubtedly, the most unguarded and intimate of all Miller's writings. And it is perhaps for this reason that Miller was so fiercely protective of his poetic voice, defending it to the last in his autobiography of 1854.³⁶ Miller's early poetry marks, not only the expression of his first published voice, but one that reflects upon the intimate subjects of death, religion and art. Centring around these, *Poems of a Journeyman Mason* offers an insight into Miller's ambivalent conception of the relationship between religion and art, his deeply psychological reflections upon death and grief, and finally, his feelings about Scottish culture and identity. Never would these themes be discussed so frankly, and with such naive simplicity and even a certain power, as in the work of these amateur poems.

Religion and Art

It is important to note that *Poems of A Journeyman Mason* was written just a few years after Miller's conversion to Evangelicism, a religion that maintained a sceptical distrust of creative vanity. Both the opening and closing poems of Miller's collection deal with the theme of poetic inspiration. In 'Introductory Stanzas', Miller sets out his own poetic position, the poem operating simultaneously as an apology for the 'roughness' of his verse and a praise to God for blessing him with the gift of the Muse by which to illuminate his 'dark days of toil'. He professes to reject the false idols of a Fame which 'is not joy, not health, nor peace of mind' and an Ambition which causes 'selfish pride | that grasps at Glory due to Heaven alone' (ll. 21, 31: *PJM*, 10). The adoption of a somewhat overweening, pious tone suggests that Miller is perhaps straining to express

³⁶ In *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, Miller describes how his pride was incensed at the public critique of his poetry and his private letters reveal a petty defensiveness with regard to his poetry's public reception.

sentiments that he had not fully resolved. The rejection of fame is a predominant feature of Miller's treatment of poetry, suggesting that perhaps he protests too much. We know that the issue of ambition was fraught for Miller, who struggled with a frustrated and guilty conviction of his talents but believing such a conviction to fly in the face of godly humility. Thus, in this poem, Miller attempts to resolve his ambivalence by rejecting fame in favour of a humble acceptance of God's bestowed gifts. In 'Fragments of An Ode to Hope', Miller returns again to this theme. Once more, he seeks to reject ambition: 'Ha! Blooms the wreath of fame for me? | No more I court her smiles in vain' (ll.2-3: *PJM*, 229). Now he claims to write freely and the very sound of this liberated poetic voice (unthralled to the aspirations of fame), 'shall bear me back the voice of praise' (l.8: *PJM*, 230). Thus the poet rejects worldly, in favour of godly, approval. Here, the poet curses the capricious personification of fame ('Ah false one! ne'er that wreath must bind | This brow' ll.9-10: *PJM*, 230) whilst Hope is characterised as a 'Deceiver' and 'jester.' The only way the poet can escape the temptations of worldly recognition is to turn his mind to the inevitability of death, 'when worldly store | Shall glad nor grieve my heart no more' (ll.65-66: *PJM*, 232). In this poem we view a common trinity in Miller's thematic treatment of art; poetic aspiration and ambition is set against a pious humility which is brought to mind by the encirclement of life by death. The utilisation of allegorical personification in the poems suggests Miller's engagement with the medieval God-centred universe. They reveal the influence of works such as Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590 - 1596) and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678 - 1684) which employed religious allegory in epic tales of Christian endeavour. The religious influence on Miller's treatment of death causes him, somewhat paradoxically, to view fame as a kind of death (fame wears a 'wreath'), presumably a death of piety, as well as viewing mindfulness of death as his

ultimate refuge from the sin of ambition. A moral death of the soul through the contamination by sinful ambition is avoided by dedicating art to God alone, as here in 'Solace':

Thou failest not, when mute the soothing lyre,
Lives thy unfading solace; sweet to raise
Thy eye, O! quiet Hope,
And great friend in Heaven
(ll.45-48: *PJM*, 214)

Elsewhere in this poem, (inviting comparison with Carlyle), Miller describes God as a kind of Divine Author invoking the 'Volume of God' (l.81), the 'Awful voice of God' (l.92) and concluding 'Fair page of truth | Is God my God' (ll. 217-18: *PJM*, 222). In 'Psalm XIII', Miller dedicates his poem: 'Lord, solac'd thus, with harp and voice | To thee shall rise my grateful strain' (ll.23-24: *PJM*, 229)³⁷ and in this way, the contending claims of art and religion are resolved through death, and worldly vanity is pacified by a pious consciousness of mortality.

Several poems take religious faith itself as their subject and these tend to be heavy with pious moralising. In 'On Seeing a Sun-Dial in a Church-Yard', Miller reflects upon our short time upon earth and the necessity to prepare for God's Heaven, where in 'Psalm XIII' faith triumphs over doubt and in 'Psalm CXXIX' the poet prophetically asks to be made a defender of God on earth. 'The Tyrant's Dirge' deflates physical power in the face of God's omniscience and 'Solace' presents Faith, Love and Hope as the antidotes to the worldly pleasures of Fame, Wealth, Honour and Ease. In

³⁷ In 'Life: Chapter Fourth', Miller expresses similar sentiments:

In the path the Redeemer has trod;
O tell them, and strengthen thy voice,
That pleg'd is the faith of God. (ll. 62-64: *PJM*, 248)

The collection ends with these lines from 'Elegy Written at Sea' where the poet meets with God:

If God be truth, 'tis sure no voice of doom
That bids th' accepted soul its robes of joy assume.
Now rest my lyre, thy pleasing task is o'er
Now rest my heart, thy cares are worse than vain. (ll.197-200: *PJM*, 259)

part, this didacticism derives from Miller's classical humanist and Evangelical insistence on the moral function of art. However, the piety and didacticism to be found in Miller's poetry is also a common feature of autodidactic writing in the nineteenth century. In the face of real physical deprivation, the nearness of death and questions of mortality loomed large in the minds of many working poets. For many thinkers of the period the solution to poverty and inequity lay in an appeal to the ultimate justice of God and the promises of the afterlife. Robert Pollok's religious poem *The Course of Time* (1826), modelled (as is much of Miller's verse), on Milton's *Paradise Lost*, reputedly sold some 78,000 copies during the mid-nineteenth century.³⁸ David Vincent has also written of the desire of the autodidactic lower classes to stand as exemplars of moral rectitude as a corrective to their reputation for dissipation.³⁹ Most often it was the writing of working men that preached the values of self-improvement, thrift and sobriety.⁴⁰ A few of Miller's poems extend beyond simple moralizing, however, and offer complex and intimate treatments on the subject of religion and faith, where God is portrayed as a refuge from the sufferings and fears of life. 'The Retrospect' is a semi-autobiographical poem depicting the moral descent from Edenic childhood. Indeed, a number of Miller's poems are nostalgic, despite the relative youth of their author. Written as an itinerant worker in the mason's barracks, there is, in the poetry, a profound sense of longing for childish freedoms. The poem mournfully recalls 'the friends of my youth, and the days that are gone', and how 'I ponder in silence deserted and alone' (ll.1-2: *PJM*, 156). These memories cast the poet back in time to where he is greeted by a celestial image of a childhood friend to whom he vows to remain loyal.

³⁸ Eyre-Todd, *The Glasgow Poets Their Lives and Poems* ed. by George Eyre-Todd (Glasgow: William Hodge and Company, 1903).

³⁹ David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (London: Europa, 1981).

The collection, in fact, is dedicated to John Swanson, with whom Miller had had a turbulent childhood friendship and to whom he was now indebted for his religious beliefs.⁴¹ Thus Swanson is represented as a godly messenger, representing the values of spiritual faith as well as childhood innocence and kinship. As time passes, the poet narrator neglects his vow of friendship and he grows cold and proud, turning to worldly things. The foreboding poetic atmosphere evokes the poet's increasingly depressive state of mind, and is suggestive of the isolation of a solitary subjectivity. It is not until the celestial friend returns to advise the poet of the salvation of God that he is released from his introspective silence. He rejects his worldly concerns and is saved from a life of despair. The poem is, in fact, symbolic of Miller's own personal experience and forms a retrospect upon his former atheistic values and worldly ambitions prior to his re-union with Swanson and his subsequent conversion. 'Stanzas Written At Sea' similarly depicts a dark night of the soul and concludes with a eulogy on the salvation of God, while in 'Life, A Poem' the four-part autobiographical story of the poet-narrator concludes by rejoicing in God and His redemption of souls:

To him who depends on his Lord
 The sorrows of age are unknown,
 For him who in faith has ador'd,
 The sufferings of Jesus atone.
 In Him may the mourner be glad
 In Him every pleasure is rife,
 Yea! Bright is the house of the dead,
 And lovely the changes of life.

('Chapter Fourth' ll.73-80, *PJM*, 249)

In stanzas such as these, the poetry is delivered not through technical innovation or craft but in the transparent simplicity of the language in conveying sincere faith.

⁴⁰ In his anthology of radical poetry from Renfrewshire, *Radical Renfrew*, Tom Leonard includes eleven poems by different working-class poets on the subject of the ills of alcohol and the benefits of temperance – more than there are collected by him on unemployment and trade unionism together.

⁴¹ Peter Bayne, I, p. 241.

Death, as in this poem, is common to all of Miller's treatments of faith. Indeed, Miller admitted in a letter to Swanson in 1822 that the fear of his own death was the motivating factor behind his first attempts to follow a religious life. Recalling the history of his unstable faith, he wrote:

So assured was I at this time of approaching dissolution that even through the perspective of hope I could only look forward on a few short months of life [...] I began seriously thinking of a preparation for death. But how was this preparation to be made? I knew prayer to be the only language by which the sinner could intercede with the Deity for pardon; but then experience had shown me how unable I was of myself to bring my mind into the frame of devotion [...] but] for awakening the sincere fervency of feeling which my expedient was to render lasting, I had before me the fear of death.⁴²

Later, in 1828, he writes of the reassuring doctrine of the immortal soul:

Even supposing [worldly pleasures] are of a less transient or changeable nature, it is certain they are completely lost to the soul when it separates from the body, that [...] being the only medium through which it can enjoy them. It is not thus with friendship. The soul cannot decay, and we have assurance from Scripture, that that which we term death is not to those who love God a death to affection. I trust that in the friend to whom I now write, I have one whom I will love and by whom I shall be loved forever. Is this not a noble hope, and does it not deserve to be cherished?⁴³

The concern with death, religion and mortality, as we have has noted, is a feature common to autodidactic writing. Many self-taught and working-men poets had real experience of death from an early age, and part of their artistic and intellectual struggle was to find meaning in the face of short and often unhappy lives. Miller's early poetry recalls much of the work of the self-taught Scottish poet, William Thom, whom Miller knew and admired. Having suffered the loss of family and material comfort himself, much of Thom's poetry reflects on the immortal nature of death-in-Christ and the refuge of Faith. In poems such as 'Love's Immortality', 'The Hills of Heaven' and

⁴² Hugh Miller, letter to John Swanson, quoted in Bayne, I, 201 (1822).

⁴³ Hugh Miller, letter to William Ross, quoted in Bayne, I, 221-222 (May 1828).

‘Where Are The Dead?’ Thom reflects that ‘Mid the anguish of this hour [...] | Is a pure immortal power | that shall dwell in light supernal | Hallow’d, glorious and eternal’ (‘Where Are The Dead’ ll. 68, 70-72).⁴⁴ The answer to the poem’s complaint is found in the afterlife where the poet is reunited with those he lost in life. In the same way, that ‘death is not to those who love God a death to affection’ was a profoundly important notion to Miller. Having lost both family and friends early in life, the Christian concepts of love and the immortal soul gave to Miller a kind of philosophical permanence by which to allay his fears of alienation from those he loved. And more than this, the idea of a paternal, immortal God must have been profoundly appealing to Miller. In this respect, Miller’s poetry also anticipates the early writing of George MacDonald, whose mystical, religious poetry sought to express the divine love of the Father-God. The lives of these two nineteenth-century writers share many common points, not least the significant loss of a parent in early childhood which overshadows much of their work, as well as an instinctive feeling for the cross-over between the supernatural and religious other-worlds, arguably arising from a traditional and rural upbringing. MacDonald shares a similar love for the Romantic, transposing the sublime landscape into the religious idyll and tempering his romantic emotionality with a strong element of poetic didacticism. His youthful poetry has much of the adolescent gloom that Miller’s early poems possess. The common pre-occupation with death and religion, however, led both poets to regard the creative act as a kind of divine inspiration, placing it very close to prophecy or revelation. Furthermore, both men revered the father figure, and saw in their God a humanised and paternal version of Calvinism’s wrathful deity. William Raeper has written of MacDonald’s paternalistic theology:

⁴⁴ William Thom, *Poems* (Glasgow: the author, 1880), p.18.

Being born out of God, in MacDonald's eyes, affirmed God as Father, more than just a Maker, and meant that everyone, whether they realised it or not, was on a road leading back to him. He was Home.⁴⁵

This kind of theological view had a powerful appeal to Miller, and his conception of the father Deity is paralleled by the imaginative representations of his father as a Christ-like hero. In 'Life, A Poem', the image of the celestial friend links the concepts of love and faith explicitly. For Miller, Christian faith attested not only to the values of loyalty and kinship but it enshrined them in a spiritual relationship that transcended death. The faith that is revealed in these early poems is one that rejoices in the solace of the eternal relationship between God and man and between man and man in God.

The Psychology of Death and Grief

Death itself is the subject of nearly half of the thirty-two poems in the collection. This is a result of the highly personalised nature of Miller's poetry; his themes are not abstract metaphysical conceptions but the negotiation of the most intimate concerns of his early life. In the opening to the *Poems*, Miller confessed that the subjects of his verse are his love for 'the place of my birth [...] and the friends to whom I am attached'.⁴⁶ It is unsurprising, therefore, that Miller's own experiences of death should first find expression in his youthful poetry, and it is perhaps in this most juvenile of Miller's literary voices that we find the sincerest expression of Miller's attempts to come to terms with life through death. While several of Miller's poems address death merely in the context of heroic endeavour, most are concerned with the physical negation in death and the process of grief. Two, in particular, are worth individual consideration. 'Ode to Jeanie' at first appears to be a simple Scots lyric, ostensibly

⁴⁵ William Raeper, *George MacDonald: Novelist and Victorian Visionary* (Herts: Lion Publishing, 1987), p. 243.

⁴⁶ Hugh Miller, 'Dedication', *Poems Written in the Leisure Hours of a Journeyman Mason*, p. 1.

written to his sister who died when Miller was a boy. The poem has a light and playful rhythm and the Scots voice is melodic and unconstrained:

Sister Jeanie, haste, we'll go
 To whare the white star'd gowans grow,
 Wi' the puddock flower o' golden hue,
 The snaw drap white, an' the bonny vi'let blue.
 (ll.1-4: *PJM*, 84)⁴⁷

While the poem is guilty of lapsing on occasion into couthie, facile rhymes (dragon flee / big red bee), the direct emotion of the poem and its ominous movement from lyrical simplicity to the leavening warning of death ('Soon shall these scenes in darkness cast | Be ravag'd wild by the wild winter blast' ll.19-20) and loss ('He wha grasps thy little hand | Nae langer at thy side shall stand' ll.25-26: *PJM*, 85) achieve a developing complexity. There is a sinister twist in the poem's end; it is not his sister's death he is writing of, but his own.

Dost thou see yon bed sae green,
 Fenc'd round wi' mony a sculptur'd stane?
 A few short weeks o' pain shall fly,
 An' asleep in that bed shall thy puir brither lie.
 (ll. 29-32: *PJM*, 85)

Miller's recasting of his own death in his sister's place probably stemmed from his guilt at surviving her. His witness to his mother's cruel words that God should have taken her son in place of her daughter has been recast by the poetic imagination, motivated by feelings of maternal rejection.

Then thy mither's tears awhile
 May chide thy joy an' damp thy smile;
 But soon ilk grief shall wear awa,
 An I'll be forgotten by ane an' by a'.
 (ll. 33-36: *PJM*, 85)

⁴⁷ The poem is transcribed in full in Appendix D.

There is real bitterness in this stanza. Despite the permanence of death, the language highlights the faithless impermanence of grief. His mother's tears remain only 'awhile' but 'soon' all grief will pass, and, being forgotten by 'one' (his mother?), he will soon be forgotten by all. Just as Miller has inhabited his sister's death, so too she is projected into the role of survivor and it is she who is rebuked by her mother's grief, she who is 'chided' and whose innocent smiles are 'dampened' by mourning. The poem gains its power from its simple language and style, written with the light rhythms of a song or childhood rhyme. But the innocence of the form paradoxically serves to highlight the bitter emotions of the poem's end, so that it echoes like a child's song sadly out of key. Here, Miller's use of Scots effectively evokes the language of childhood, delivered, poignantly, in his 'mother' tongue.

'Stanzas Written At Sea' and 'Elegy Written At Sea' appear to be two versions of the same poem, dealing, as they do, with the same subject and even sharing some lines. They are considered here, therefore, as developments of one poem. In the latter version, Miller again expresses guilt at his survival upon his father's death and his childish inability to grieve:

Scowl'd bleak misfortune on thy infant day,
 Bereavement's bitt'rest pangs thy mother's were,
 Heart-sick'ning woe, sharp want, and carking care,
 And grief for pleasures gone, and bodings wild,
 Her only solace thou, to ward despair,
 A little passionless ungrieving child,
 Who, all unskill'd to mourn, saw her sad tears and smil'd.
 (ll. 84-90: *PJM*, 254)

In this poem imaginative empathy for his mother leads him to the point of self-recrimination. Just as MacDonald's writing expresses the complexity of the father-son relationship and its attempted resolution through paternal theology and Christian

heroism, so one might suggest that the more emotive, perhaps even supernatural, elements in Miller's poetry derive from his mother. There is a folkloric element in Miller's poetry that casts back to an older communion with the otherworldly, an element of fantasy that is beyond religious reasoning, for example in the haunting of Walter Hogg in 'A Boatman's Tale' or the supernatural story-teller in 'A Tale of Youth'. There may be something of the psychology of the whimsical James Barrie, whose *Peter Pan* never-never lands project a psychological landscape in order to appease an overshadowing maternal figure.⁴⁸

In both 'Stanzas Written At Sea' and 'Elegy Written At Sea', the poetic conception is somewhat vague and it is some time before the poem really enters its stride. 'Stanzas Written At Sea' was Miller's earlier composition and it lacks formal control, sometimes lapsing into an almost breathless indulgence in imagery. In it, the poet once more thanks the Muse for rescuing him from a life of unalleviated toil. He ponders the imaginative feats that poetry can perceive, such as the mermaid and the shipwrecked vessel; but despite the beauty that the Muse can render from the sea, to the poet it is a channel of death. Once more the image of his father's death haunts the imagery of the poem.

Gloomy and wide rolls the sepulchral sea,
 Grave of my kindred, of my sire the grave,
 Perchance where he now sleeps, a space for me
 Is mark'd by fate, beneath the deep green wave.
(ll. 33-36: *PJM*, 153)

Later in the poem, the poet reflects upon how a sea grave would actually feel.

⁴⁸ As Barrie's one time secretary, Cynthia Asquith, writes in her biography, *Portrait of Barrie* (London: Robert Cunningham and Sons, 1954), 'Peter Pan isn't a boy is he? He's a wish-fulfilment projection in fable form of the kind of mother – Barrie's an expert at her – who doesn't want her son to grow up.' Miller's poems express a kind of perverse inversion of the immortal youth fantasy, instead projecting death to appease the grief of his mother, a step into the other-world that must have seemed so accessible to one raised in the febrile spiritual atmosphere of his mother's home.

Why this strange thought? if in that ocean laid,
 The ear would cease to hear, the eye to see;
 Tho' sights and sounds like these circled my bed,
 Wakeless and heavy would my slumbers be:
 Though the mild soften'd sunlight beam'd on me,
 (If a dull heap of bones retained my name,
 That bleach'd or blacken'd in the wasteful sea,)
 Its radiance all unseen, its golden beam
 In vain through coral groves, or em'rald roofs might stream.
 (ll.46-54: *PJM*, 154)

Just as in 'Ode to Jeanie', Miller expresses a morbid desire to experience the death of his loved ones. Here, the stanza evokes the poet's sense of futility in his father's death; the gifts of sight and sound are numbed, sleep is dreamless, the body of man is decayed by 'the wasteful sea' which robs even light of its beauty, a light which is streaming 'in vain' through the water. Once more, the symbiosis of death and religion provides the resolution to Miller's fears about mortality. Faith opposes futility, and the poet is inspired by the conclusion that the spirit is not earth- (or indeed sea)-bound and that it shall yet rise to Heaven.

The later poem suffers from excessive subsequent embellishment. Unsuccessfully adopting the lush metaphoric idiom of the Romantics, the original sentiments of the earlier poem have been dressed up in florid and overweening language.

The orb of the night, thron'd in the Western sky
 Sheds her expiring rays athwart the sea
 Mournful as a tyrant king stretched on the couch of pain.
 (ll.7-9: *PJM*, 50)

The metaphors are clumsy and mixed. Miller is seeking to evoke the sea's regal dictatorship ('tyrant king') a sea that takes lives without mercy. Again, he vents his anger at the sea:

No! yet I love thee not sepulchral sea,
 "Grave of my kindred, of my sire the grave;"
 I love thee not, – my grandsire sleeps in thee,
 In thee his brothers sleep, 'vent'rous and brave,
 One wander'd patient o'er thy breast, O wave!
 The boast and joy of Anson's warrior train;
 Dauntless that sailor heard the wild winds rave,
 Saw the fight rage, for rich with golds of Spain,
 Of home he thought and joy'd, – alas! his joys were vain.
(ll.19-27: *PJM*, 251)

The poem is reminiscent of another of Miller's literary heroes, William Cowper, whose *The Castaway* depicts a tragedy during one of Anson's voyages and evokes the despair of man's life encircled, as it is, by death. Miller's poem describes how his sailor never reaches home and the grief of the waiting family. The fifth stanza repeats his rejection of the sea ('I love thee not, thou deep sepulchral wave' l.37: *PJM*, 252), it having deprived his father of his family's resting-place. Then, in a stanza written directly to his father he continues:

And thou, my father, when I think of thee
 My eyelids moisten with th' unwonted tear;
 For thou were as gentle, kind as free,
 Stranger alike to brutal rage or fear,
 A tender friend, to all thy kindred dear,
 Thy soul's intelligence a flash of light,
 To tyrant sway and tyrant men severe,
 Peace seldom listn'd to thy deeds of might,
 But dauntless warrior thou when clos'd the deathful fight.
(ll.50-58: *PJM*, 252)

The poem continues in this heroic tribute to his father. Here the Miltonic influence of the Christian epic hero is particularly strong. His father is depicted in Christ-like terms ('gentle warrior', 'bold soldier', 'tender friend'). The Christian hero was typically depicted as both active and contemplative, not only physically courageous but spiritually powerful in the face of religious trials and sufferings. The depiction of the father at sea (which recalls the common medieval conception of man as forlorn and at

sea seeking the refuge of God) portrays him superficially as an adventurous hero but also suggests his spiritual power in contest with the storms of life. The father's ultimate triumph in battling the elements is conveyed with spiritual overtones, culminating in his ascendance to heaven at the poem's end.

Patriotism and Vernacular Culture

Miller's concern with the heroic is partly derivative of the Miltonic and Augustan influence. Yet, as Miller describes in *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, his childhood literary influences established an early connection between heroism and patriotism. In the autobiography Miller admitted that after reading Blind Harry's *Wallace* he was 'intoxicated with the fiery narratives of the blind minstrel – with his fierce breathings of hot intolerant patriotism, and his stories of astonishing prowess; and glorying in being a Scot, and the countryman of Wallace and the Graham, I longed for a war with the Southron, that the wrongs and sufferings of these noble heroes might be avenged'. (S&S, 38) It is through his poetry that Miller enacts his heroic fantasy. Yet Miller is still able to render a didactic meaning from the heroic narrative. In the poems, victory in battle signals a moral triumph. Writing of the battle of Prestonpans in 'The Death of Gardiner', the poet exclaims: 'But oh! In dark oppression's day [...] | Who are the brave in freedom's cause? | The men who fear the Lord' (ll.85, 87-8: *PJM*, 17). Here, the Scots are God's pious warriors, whereas in 'Greece – An Ode' there is an unpleasant moral vengeance in Miller's depiction of the imminent downfall of Islam: 'Ruin awaits the Moslem line | Mohamet's faith shall die! [...] | The Koran's darken'd page is torn | And Turkey's streams are rolling red | With the blood of the unborn' (ll.48-49, 51-53: *PJM*, 73). In these poems we find Miller at his least sympathetic. His hot-headed patriotism reveals an unpleasant bigotry, whilst the inclination to regard

God as a partisan to the moral superiority of the Christian faith illustrates Miller's own tendency towards religious prejudice.

In a small but significant number of poems Miller ventures into vernacular idiom. Of his Scots poems, 'Ode to Jeanie,' is outstandingly the most successful. Here, the use of Scots, in its simplicity and directness, retains the integrity of native dialect and its power to move the emotions. Miller adopts balladic details of colour ('yon bed sae green' l.32, 'the snaw drap white' l. 4) and repetition, which heighten the elegiac atmosphere of the poem and its regretful nostalgia for the past. 'Epitaph' is a frank and affectionate elegy, rendered in a simple but forceful use of Scots and with a confident, musical rhythm in the manner of the folk limerick.

What was gude in life he kent it,
 Quiet he lived, an' died contented;
 Twa three honest bodies mourn'd him,
 A' the rest or blam'd or scorn'd him
(ll.25-28: *PJM*, 87)

However, Miller's literary use of Scots is often constrained and artificial. In David Masson's recollections, he describes Miller's peculiar accent thus: 'His language was choice, and the idiom not Scottish, unless when he chose, but good English – rendered strange to the ear, however, by his far-north pronunciation.'⁴⁹ Miller, it seems, did not speak in vernacular Scots and his literary usage of it is probably an appeal to the established vernacular models of Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns, poets whose handling of the Scots language he is ill-equipped to imitate. The effect of Miller's attempts to express sophisticated poetic imagery through vernacular Scots dialect can be jarring, as here in 'Ode to my Mither Tongue':

Thine whan victory his temple's wreath'd,

⁴⁹ David Masson, *Memories of Two Cities*, p. 150.

The sang that arose o'er the prostrate fae.

An' loftier still, the enraptur'd saint,
 Whan the life o' time was glimm'ring awa
 (ll.47-50: *PJM*, 77)⁵⁰

Miller cannot be blamed for his unusual orthography in an age when no prescribed style for transcribing dialect existed. But even allowing this, his is a very contrived rendering of spoken Scots. In 'Ode to my Mither Tongue' the rhythm is clumsy and the verse flow broken by an overwrought use of language. It has the rhythm of a poor translation, as though the ideas have been conceived in English and then rendered into a broken Scots. In the context of a Scots poem, there is an uncomfortable mixture of differing registers: 'the prostrate fae' and 'enraptur'd saint' are overstrained attempts at classical idiom which appear misplaced in a poem concerned with the value of vernacular usage.

The clashing of poetic idioms signals a deeper confusion as to the cultural stance of this poem. Despite it being an 'Ode to my Mither Tongue' the poet-narrator appears to oscillate between the roles of patriotic Scot, vindicating the integrity of native culture, and the romantic bard, re-enacting a cultural cliché.

For him wha now essays the lyre
 That thrill'd sae sweet in bye-gane time,
 Scarce haufins warm'd wi' minstrel fire,
 An' little skill'd in lear o' rhyme,
 What meed remains? hope that his sang,
 Rude though it be, an' harsh I ween,
 May shaw fu' lang my mither tongue
 That neither weak thy muse nor mean.
 (ll.89-96: *PJM*, 79)

There is indeed no reason why the patriotic Scot might not be a poet of stylised, high-registered speech (as in the 'high style' of poets such as James VI and Drummond of

⁵⁰ 'Ode to Jeanie' and 'Ode to My Mither Tongue' are transcribed in full in Appendix D.

Hawthornden in the seventeenth-century European Renaissance). Yet Miller's claim to assert this position in 'his mither tongue' fails. While it may be possible for skilled poets to mix register as in the English/Scots of Burns's *Tam O' Shanter*, where Miller attempts to convey developed imagery or idea he resorts to Romantic posturing and ornate English with only the occasional smattering of Scots. The poem itself offers some revealing insights into Miller's view of the linguistic situation of Scotland (and one cannot help but note Miller's poor sense of rhythm in lines such as these):

I lo'e thee weel my mither tongue,
 An' a' thy tales, or sad or wild;
 Right early to thy heart they've clung,
 Right soon my dark'ning thoughts beguil'd.
 Ay, aft to thy sangs o' a lang syne day,
 That tell o' the bluidy fight sublime
 I've listen'd, till died the present away,
 An' return'd the deeds o' departed time.
(ll.33-40: *PJM*, 76)

Here, Miller is associating his mother tongue explicitly with oral folklore ('aft to thy sangs o' lang syne day') rather than asserting Scots as a medium of intellectual discourse. Yet, recognising the debased situation of the vernacular, Miller laments that Scots is no longer the language of the poet, court and church. Unfortunately, the poem only reinforces the unhealthy condition of the vernacular in the hands of unskilled poets, and Miller's appeal to Burns here serves only to emphasise its unfortunate associations with the rustic stereotype.

The swain this warl' shall never forget!
 Thine mother tongue his sangs o' fame, -
 'Twill learning be to ken thee yet.
(ll.86-88: *PJM*, 79)

In several vernacular poems Miller is over-reliant on the romanticised figure of the peasant bard. In 'Elegy' Miller again descends into rustic cliché.

In pride I strung my lyre anew,
 An' wak'd its chords again.
 The sound was sad, the sparkling tear
 Arose in Myra's e'e,
 An' mair I lo'ed that artless drap,
 Than a' the warl' could gie'.
 (ll.75-80: *PJM*, 83)

Inspired by the success of Burns, the work of many less gifted nineteenth-century Scottish poets was marred by the intention to emulate his romanticisation of rural Scotland. However, Burns's particular success lay in his ability to suggest the harsh conditions of Scottish rural life whilst appealing to the romantic fascination with rusticity and primitive culture. In the hands of lesser writers, the combination of vernacular and romance produced early forms of kailyard. Miller simply does not have the poetic imagination to invest his use of Scots either with technical or thematic vitality. Instead, 'Ode To My Mither Tongue' simply lists those who have spoken Scots in the past and the instances in which it was once used. There is no framing monologue here, no filtering of idea through ironic or parodic mode, no characterisation, little philosophy, in short no complexity, no biting point. Lacking in sophisticated poetic device and linguistic confidence, it reads as a diluted and sentimental lament.

In poems such as 'The Patriot' Miller praises the native virtues of Scottish history and culture and, somewhat ironically, urges intellectuals to renounce their bias for classical subjects and return their gaze to the value of 'my native land' (l.101: *PJM*, 31). This is a noble enough sentiment, but the poem flounders once more in its use of stylised romantic depictions of the Celtic savage at war ('Ah not unheard is Ossian's thrilling song | The shades of heroes round the minstrel throng' ll. 439 –40: *PJM*, 44) derived from fashionable literary conceptions of Scotland, in a poem attempting to support the integrity of the past. 'The Patriot' hints at the force of Miller's rhetorical

expression and begs the conclusion that this weak poem might have made a better prose essay. In poetry, Miller is constrained by his reliance on literary models. Here, his mimetic use of stock imagery undermines the integrity of his argument and ‘The Patriot’ appears to lose faith in its own intentions, concluding in a bathetic romantic fantasy. Where the poet’s intentions began with a call for greater *intellectual* engagement with native history, the poem itself concludes upon the, rather feeble, comforts of a beautiful landscape. The poet admits that his poetry cannot revive interest in Scottish achievements but will be content with not disgracing them (‘O! though my songs shall ne’er increase that fame | Ne’er shall my deeds emblush thy cheek with shame’ 1.573: *PJM*, 49). ‘The Patriot’ concludes by reflecting that even if Scotland has never achieved intellectual recognition, the poet hopes that it is yet to become a land of beauty and comfort. Though Scotland is ‘Unknown, unfam’d, time’s dubious span to pass’, nevertheless the poet can

Hope in partial quiet for active bliss, -
 Bliss in a land where nought of woe is found,
 Where fadeless pleasures ease the ceaseless round,
 Fair without pride, and without madness, gay.
 (1l.574-578: *PJM* 49-50)

This is a somewhat bathetic end, describing an over-simplified scene of domestic national harmony. In such depictions, Miller is in danger of falsifying the industrial and political realities that faced nineteenth-century Scotland in favour of the kind of fictional fantasies about which he would later be so critical.⁵¹

In these vernacular poems Miller attempts to emulate, somewhat uncomfortably, the vernacular models of Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns. But Miller’s nineteenth-

⁵¹ In an essay entitled ‘The Literature of the People’ (*The Witness*, 27th October, 1849), Miller condemned literary presentations that drew from ‘mere imagination’ and implored that the working classes of Scotland produce writing that would represent the reality of their experience. (For further discussion see Chapter 10).

century vernacular is a pale imitation of the successes of the eighteenth. Nevertheless, it was ideologically important to Miller to express his concerns about Scots language and culture. The vernacular idiom gave credence to his cultural and political self-positioning, demonstrating his appreciation of a native, spoken Scots.⁵² In the dialectic of authority and integrity, the vernacular idiom is a reference to Miller's Burnsian position as a writer of the people. That Miller lacks the skill to handle his native Scots in an imaginative context is a signal of the inferiority of his poetic ability.

It is not difficult to see why *Poems of a Journeyman Mason* was commercially and critically unsuccessful. The poems are heavily reliant on Miller's poetic models and fail to proceed from imitation to real creative invention. As a result, the collection has a stiff, constrained feeling, as if Miller had appropriated verse forms from older models into which he simply implants the substance of his themes. Yet, wanting in artistic value, Miller's poetry does reveal the self-conscious idiomatic negotiations of the autodidact. Lacking in the confidence to adhere to one poetic idiom and stretch it to his creative needs, Miller instead oscillates between the idioms of his literary models, merely invoking them as allies for his shifting ideological needs. Thematically, although occasionally powerful, the poems are commonplace, demonstrating neither originality of thought nor narrative skill. Mackenzie, in the scant attention that he devotes to Miller's poetry, dismisses the collection, stating that:

⁵² Although Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns actually articulate vastly different agendas (Ramsay's use of the vernacular is that of the antiquarian man of letters and his attitude to vernacular culture somewhat condescending, Fergusson's vernacular poetry is in the tradition of the Renaissance humanists of the seventeenth century and is concerned with urban Augustan themes while Burns plays upon the Romantic association of the rustic noble savage) it was a conception of the nineteenth-century (and one which Miller imbibed) that these three Scots writers, each utilising Scots dialect, therefore possessed a shared and equal concern with patriotic and vernacular values.

The epilogue of the book is apologetic [...] Not thus, however, is the volume to be saved from the aesthetic judgement, which may be expressed in one of his own lines; 'O, it is drear, fearfully drear.'⁵³

A morbidity and moral sententiousness, unleavened by a dense and often monotonous versification, does indeed burden the *Poems*. Yet, in the final analysis, *Poems of a Journeyman Mason* is important in demonstrating the first, and tentative, expression of Miller's literary voice. And more significantly perhaps, it provides a profound insight into Miller's own mind. Several poems are explicitly autobiographical and the collection as a whole is very much a reflection, albeit unwitting, of Miller's interior response to the world that he perceives around him. In these early, amateur poems Miller betrays an intimate expression of some of his most personal and philosophical concerns. And, as such, the collection offers the first articulation of Miller's thematic concerns: those of artistic self-expression, native culture, religion and the immaterial world, which were to become central to his body of writing and thought.

⁵³ W. M. Mackenzie, *Hugh Miller: A Critical Study*, p. 50.

Chapter Six:

From *Sennachie* to ‘Voice of the People’

Early Prose Genres

With *Poems of a Journeyman Mason* attracting little commercial or critical attention, Miller next turned his hand to writing prose. The decision to abandon verse would seem to have been a prudent one but, in turning to prose, Miller, it appears, was not abandoning his poetic aspirations. Lydia advised Bayne that the relinquishment of poetry was intended to be temporary and that Miller planned to ‘resume verse in a poem to be entitled ‘The Leper’’.¹ Miller's private letters might seem to demonstrate his awareness of his own failings as a poet but his continuing dedication to the poetic voice (continuing to publish his verse in *The Witness* and submitting several of his amateur poems in the 1854 autobiography), appears to demonstrate a lack of understanding regarding his own particular artistic talents and failings. Miller's movement away from poetry does not indicate a self-aware artistic progression. Instead, Miller's exploration of the genres of short fiction, journalistic essay, folkloric study and epistolary public letter during the 1830s seems to arise from his continued search for a suitable vehicle of self-expression and to find some other means by which to achieve literary notice. Miller was to find that it was prose that would facilitate the commanding social and philosophical critiques for which he would gain his eventual recognition.

Following the disappointment of the *Poems* in 1829, Robert Carruthers offered Miller a commission to write a series of articles for *The Inverness Courier*. The essays, entitled *Five Letters on the Herring Fishing in the Moray Frith*, revealed Miller's real

¹ Peter Bayne, I, 239.

ability in prose writing. Despite the apparent mundanity of the subject, Miller infused his prose with a descriptive power and narrative energy that immediately raised the homely subject of the fishing trade to a compelling account of the dangers and solitude of the sea. So well received were Miller's *Herring Letters*, that Scott himself endeavoured to obtain a copy – a fact that Miller proudly records in his autobiography.² In *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, Miller recollects the importance of the *Herring Letters*:

Their modicum of success, lowly as was their subject, compared with that of some of my more ambitious verses, taught me my proper course. Let it be my business, I said, to know what is not generally known; - let me qualify myself to narrate as pleasingly and describe as vividly as I can, let truth, not fiction, be my walk. (S&S, 416)

This retrospective statement, made in 1854, suggests that Miller was perhaps aware, latterly, that his gifts did not lie in creative writing. Yet writing as a public religious figure in *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, there may also be some retrospective adjustment in the account of his turn away from the frivolities of fiction and towards the greater goal of (revealed?) 'truth'. Certainly though, it was Miller's increasingly didactic, socially critiquing voice, a voice concerned with tangible realities rather than fictional constructs, that was to be prove Miller's lasting literary achievement.

With the success of the *Letters on the Herring Fishing*, Miller continued as a journalist for *The Inverness Courier* for several years. However, during 1834-5 Miller was also successful in printing some of his creative writing in Mackay Wilson's *Tales of the Borders* and *Chamber's Journal*. A representative collection of these is presented

² Miller's footnote reads, 'I am reminded by the editor of the *Courier*, in a very kind critique on the present volume, of a passage in the history of my little work which had escaped my memory. "It had come", he states, "to the knowledge of Walter Scott, who endeavoured to procure a copy after the limited impression was exhausted."' (S&S, 416) There is no copy of *Letters on the Herring Fishing* in Scott's library.

in the posthumous *Tales and Sketches* (1863) gathered by Miller's widow.³ It is an unusual and anomalous collection, and Lydia's title perhaps best describes the combination of fiction and essay that Miller was writing at this time. His experiments in prose writing range from the curious fictional biographies; 'Recollections' of Fergusson and Burns⁴, to didactic *bildungsroman* in the tales of 'The Young Surgeon'⁵ and 'McCulloch the Mechanician', semi-antiquarian folk collection in 'The Lykewake' and traditional supernatural tales such as 'The Widow of Dunskaith'.⁶

The first thing to note about Miller's short fiction is that the stories resist 'authorship' in the modern proprietorial sense of 'creative ownership.' A writer such as Carlyle sought literary authority from the author-izing of his particular and individual narrative. The traditional storyteller, by contrast, was concerned with the communal source of his tales and, as a result, was self-conscious in highlighting the *inheritance*, rather than ownership of his stories. In *My Schools and Schoolmasters* Miller recalled that his ability in storytelling had earned him the nickname of *sennachie*, and it is in this role of tradition-bearer, rather than fictional writer, that Miller appears to have conceived his early story-telling voice. In 'The Lykewake' Miller's presence in the tale serves to heighten his authorial distance from the actual stories being passed on to him.

³ As almost all of Miller's early prose fiction (ten from a total of thirteen fictional pieces) are collected in the posthumous *Tales and Sketches*, I will refer to that anthology of works as generally representative of Miller's early writing. Therefore, all page references are to the 1863 edition of *Tales and Sketches* (T&S).

⁴ 'Recollections of Ferguson' [sic] and 'Recollections of Burns' first appeared in volume III of John MacKay Wilson's *Tales of the Borders* (1835 – 40) pp. 81- 91 and pp. 145- 58. 'Recollections of Burns' was later reprinted 'For Private Circulation only' by William Mollison and Co. in 1886 to be distributed at the Burns Festival in London of that year.

⁵ This appears to have been unpublished prior to its appearance in *Tales and Sketches* (1863).

⁶ 'McCulloch the Mechanician' first appeared in Miller's *Scenes and Legends* (1835) as 'Maculloch the mechanician' (in Chapter 28) as did 'The Widow of Dunskaith' as 'The Fisherman's Widow' (Chapter 12) and 'George Ross, the Scotch Agent' (Chapter 30). The story of George Ross also appeared under the same title in *Chambers's Journal*, Issue 303, 18 November, 1837 (pp. 337 –8). 'The Widow of Dunskaith' appeared in *Wilson's Tales of the Borders* Vol. III, pp. 313 – 19. 'The Salmon Fisher of Udoll' first appeared in Vol III (pp. 313-19) and 'The Lykewake' and 'Bill Whyte' in volume IV of *Wilson's Tales* (pp. 41-48 and pp. 161 – 169). 'The Story of the Scotch Merchant of the Eighteenth Century' was originally written at the private commission of Mr William Forsyth and published under the title *Memoir of William Forsyth, Esq. A Scotch Merchant of the Eighteenth Century* in 1839 in London by Stewart and Murray prior to its re-publication in *Tales and Sketches*.

Similarly, in 'The Salmon-Fisher of Udoll', Miller locates his tale within local history: 'In the autumn of 1759, the Bay of Udoll [...] was occupied by two large salmon-wears, the property of one Allan Thomson'. (*T&S*, 118) 'The Widow of Dunskaith' begins in a similar manner: 'I am wretchedly uncertain in my dates; but it must have been some time late in the reign of Queen Anne.' (*T&S*, 150) The interjection of factual detail by the narrator relates Miller's stories to a geographic and temporal reality shared by the writer and his audience. Miller gathers the facts of his tales in the manner of the editor, the fact-finder, as here in 'The Young Surgeon': 'Another poem, of somewhat the same stamp as the former, we may insert here. It is in the handwriting of the young surgeon, among a collection of his pieces, but is marked "Anonymous".' (*T&S*, 251) At the ending of 'Bill Whyte', despite the creaky implausibility of the plot, Miller suggests that the story forms a record of a genuine life-story told to him by a local gypsy. In 'The Salmon Fisher of Udoll', Miller's suggestion that his character would possess no attraction to the novelist implies that his protagonist, instead, is based on a real person⁷ and the ending, (with its passive, rather than personal, construction), is implicitly that of local lore ('It was observed, however, that his dark brown hair was soon mingled with masses of grey [...] It was remarked, too, that when attacked by a lingering epidemic, which passed over well-nigh the whole country, he of all the people was the only one that sank under it.' (*T&S*, 146)) In the same way, 'The Widow of Dunskaith' is attributed to the lore of the local country: 'There is a little rocky bay a few hundred

⁷Indeed, several of Miller's tales are based, not on fiction, but on real historical people such as George Ross, Kenneth McCulloch and, emphatically 'The True Story of the Life of a Scotch Merchant,' William Forsyth. George Ross was the son of a proprietor of Easter Ross and later a confidant to Lord Mansfield, Duke of Grafton. After a period in England he returned to Cromarty where he established trade in hemp cloth, lace, ale and pork, educated his tenants in rearing wheat and established a nail and spade factory. He was also responsible for the building of the local Gaelic chapel, council-room and prison building as well as housing for the poor. His portrait now hangs in the drawing room of Cromarty House. Kenneth McCulloch was born in Cromarty and eventually attained recognition as the inventor of the sea compass utilised by King Henry on board the *Andromeda*. William Forsyth was merchant in Cromarty in the mid-eighteenth century and a local magistrate and Kirk elder. His speculations in the local fishing trade, particularly herring, and in kelp were important in reviving the floundering local economy.

yards to the west, which has been known for ages to all the seafaring men of the place as the Cova Green [...] Nor does the scene want its old story to strengthen its hold on the imagination.' (*T&S*, 149) The phrasing here is revealing. The story belongs to the landscape, rather than the scene acting as a mere backdrop to the story. Miller here rejects the fictional school of pasteboard settings; his landscapes are the very source and subject of his tales – and it is perhaps for this reason that he wishes to emphasise the landscape's *actuality* and the story's *fictionality*. He wishes to stress the concrete existence of an enduring landscape that possesses its own stories. The tale, then, is not valued merely for its narrative interest, but for preserving the kind of story expressed by the isolated, rural community from where it came.

In highlighting the traditional and communal sources behind his tales, Miller is himself retreating from the role of the creative writer. Later, in *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland* (1835), Miller would employ this technique to demonstrate his role as a receptor, rather than inventor, of narratives.⁸ Miller's invocation of traditional sources is a technique notably shared by Miller's autodidactic predecessor, James Hogg. In *The Three Perils of Man* (1822), Hogg diverts the narrative away from authorial invention to the received narratives of 'old Isaac, the curate' in a novel, itself concerned with the themes of storytelling, fiction and relative truth. Similarly, in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of A Justified Sinner* (1824) the editor's rationalistic interpretation is emphatically balanced against the record of community 'tradition'. Both self-taught, labouring men from rural Scotland, the intention to direct their narratives away from authorial ownership and towards a broader, shared communal

⁸ In his tale of the Urquharts of Cromarty, for example, Miller writes that: 'The first of his ancestors, whose story receives some shadow of confirmation from tradition, was a contemporary of Wallace and the Bruce.' (*S&L*, 47) The book has many such references to traditional sources: 'The first of his family, says tradition, was Alaster Macculloch, a native of the Highlands'. ('Macculloch's Courtship' (*S&L*, 67); 'There are a few other traditions of this northern part of the country [...] which bear the palpable impress of pagan or semi-pagan origin. I have heard imperfectly preserved stories of a lady dressed in green...'

lore, appears to derive from a peculiarly folkloric inheritance. Thus, although many of Miller's works tell stories, they are rarely his own creations and therefore cannot be judged by the standard criterion of literary invention.

Not only does Miller defer to tradition, there is also a degree of insecurity suggested in Miller's curious deference towards other novelists and creative writers, a feature of his writing which implies a self-conscious withdrawal from the claim to creative invention. Introducing the protagonist of 'The Salmon Fisher of Udoll', he apologetically states that 'a novelist would scarcely make choice of such a person for the hero of their tale'. (*T&S*, 118) At the emotional climax to 'The Widow of Dunskaith,' he retreats: 'But why dwell on a scene which I feel myself ill-fitted to describe?' (*T&S*, 167). At other junctures in his fiction he invokes the names of established writers in an intertextual reference to the superior handling of his theme: 'Who is not acquainted with Dryden's story of Cymon?' ('The Young Surgeon' *T&S*, 250); 'Who of all my readers is unacquainted with Goldsmith's admirable stories of the sailor with the wooden leg and the half-starved Merry-Andrew?' ('The Lykewake' *T&S*, 172); 'You remember how Sir Walter describes the funeral of Athelstane?' ('Bill Whyte' *T&S*, 208). This type of artistic deference continues in Miller's most mature writing⁹, suggesting the persistence of a creative anxiety and literary deference even after he had achieved independent recognition. That same over-reliance on literary models, which had haunted his poetry, appears to constrain his fiction and his attempts at dramatisation repeatedly descend into mere melodrama. This combined with Miller's

('The Extinct Species' *S&L*, 70); 'It has borne, from the earliest recollections of tradition, the name of Morial's Den' ('Legend of Morial's Den' *S&L*, 71) and so on.

⁹ In *My Schools and Schoolmasters* we find: 'Only a few evenings after; I met the same young lady, in circumstances in which the writer of a tale might have made a little more.' (*S&S*, 475); 'I have witnessed scenes, of which the author of the "Jolly Beggars" might have made rare use, but which formed a sort of materials that I lacked the special ability rightly to employ.' (*S&S*, 371); 'The story, as told me in that solitary valley, just as the sun was skulking over the hill beyond, powerfully impressed my fancy. Crabbe would have delighted to tell it; and I now relate it, as it lies fast wedged in my memory, mainly for the particular light which it casts on the times of hereditary jurisdictions.' (*S&S*, 110).

insistence on a didactic purpose (used, all too often, as a justification for his writing), result in a discursive heavy-handedness and lack of creative vitality. The deathbed scenes of the ‘The Young Surgeon’ and of Lillias in ‘The Salmon Fisher of Udoll’ possess that same combination of melodrama and overweening piety reminiscent of the earlier *The Man of Feeling* (1771) by Henry Mackenzie and later characteristic of kailyard fiction. Depicting the death of Lillias and her closing words, Miller writes:

“I am weak, and cannot say more; but let me hear you speak. Read to me the eighth chapter of Romans” [...] there was a fluttering of the pulse, a glazing of the eye; the breast ceased to heave, the heart to beat: the silver cord parted in twain, and the golden bowl was broken. Thomson contemplated for a moment the body of his mistress, and, striking his hand against his forehead, rushed out of the apartment. (*T&S*, 145)

Such passages suggest a straightforward mimesis of literary models.

A further difficulty in discussing Miller’s writing is its defiance of generic classification. In Miller’s tales fact and fiction blur, combining elements of recollection, biography, tradition and invention. Often his stories are a synthesis of folkloric record and personal experience embellished with Miller’s skill for inventive description. There is a poignant image in the story of ‘Bill Whyte’ describing the effects of war upon the bewildered birds in the sky, which Miller recalled from an account of his Uncle Sandy’s actual war experiences. In ‘The Widow of Dunskaith’ Miller depicts an evocative dreamscape of rich psychological symbolism as the widow enters the sea in an attempt to be reunited with her dead husband:

The water at last closed o’er me, an I sank frae aff the rock to the sand at the bottom. But death seemed to have no power given him to hurt me; an I walked as light as ever I hae done on a gowany brae, through the green depths o’ the sea. I saw the silvery glitter o’ the trout an’ the salmon shining to the sun far, far aboon me, like white pigeons in the lift; an aroun’ me there were crimson starfish, an sea-flowers an’ long trailing plants, that waved in the tide like streamers. (*T&S*, 160)

The scene is both suggestive of Miller's psychological projections into the nature of his father's death in his early poetry and also recalls the traditional Celtic theory of dreaming whereby the sleeping mind actually journeys (and which Miller later described in his autobiography, *My Schools and Schoolmasters*). This is outstandingly Miller's most successful fictional work. However, Miller's movement between 'fiction' and 'factuality', between the story and the ideas which inform it, often produce uncomfortable results, as here in 'The Salmon Fisher of Udoll':

Lillias blushed at the charge, and hung down her head [...] She had lived under the roof of her father in a little paradise of thoughts and imaginations, the spontaneous growth of her own mind; and as she grew up to womanhood, she had recourse to the companion of books; for in books only could she find thoughts and imaginations of a kindred character [...]

It is rarely that the female mind educates itself. The genius of the sex is rather fine than robust; it partakes rather of the delicacy of the myrtle than the strength of the oak; and care and culture seem essential to its full development. Whoever heard of a female Burns or Bloomfield? (*T&S*, 131)

In several tales Miller's frequent recourse to discursive digression reveals the somewhat laborious nature of his narrative style. Several reflective passages are repeated word by word in different works (the above analysis of women's education is repeated exactly in 'Life of A Scotch Merchant') revealing that Miller often simply transplanted material more appropriate to the speculative essay into the narrative. This way of working suggests that Miller sought opportunities to insert his carefully honed 'set pieces' into different pieces of writing. Indeed, this 'cutting and pasting' technique is much the same as the rehearsal of ideas demonstrated in Miller's early correspondence to his patrons. Such an enterprise suggests an anxious desire for self-expression, far from the inventive self-assurance of the established writer. The effect on Miller's stories, moreover, is that they are often burdened by unnecessary didactic and speculative digression and lack the vitality necessary for fictional suspense and drama.

Despite the fact that Miller, as we have seen, was steeped in Augustan literature, a school noted for its generic prescriptiveness,¹⁰ the intergeneric style of Miller's writing indicates a cultural inheritance that precedes the Augustan preference for classical decorum and uniformity of genre. Oscillation between genres characterises the traditional folktale. As Lucie Armitt writes in her theoretical examination of the folktale, 'Where else could one go to find textual authority [...] more clearly undermined by its own intergeneric and intertextual playfulness?'¹¹ Once more, the writing of James Hogg instances a similar generic ambivalence; his *The Three Perils of Man*, for example, combines epic adventure, historical romance and traditional storytelling in a radically inventive format organised around thematic contrasts and radical temporal shifts. If neoclassical critique, with its preference for conformity and the objectively knowable world¹², favours generic uniformity, then the generic ambiguity that characterises the folkloric tradition might betray a deeper ambiguity regarding the stability of reason and order. Miller's writing displays a permeable line between notions of fact and fantasy, memory and fiction, history and legend and the concrete and ethereal. Indeed, the remarkable fluidity of Miller's literary voice appears to have its roots in this slip-line of the mortal and unearthly. Mediating between the possibilities of fact and fiction in his narrative approach, Miller exposes the instability of 'reality' itself, in a writing corpus often concerned with the untenable and indefinable.

¹⁰ In *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), Alastair Fowler notes that: 'No one can dispute that much neoclassical genre criticism was crudely prescriptive' (p. 26).

¹¹ Lucie Armitt, in *Theorising the Fantastic* (London: Arnold, 1996), p. 20. Armitt utilises the terms 'fairytale' and 'folktale' interchangeably in order to respond to Vladimir Propp's and Tzvetan Todorov's seminal discussions on the fairytale and fantasy genres.

¹² Paul Fussell in *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism* notes that, 'One condition essential to the coherence and vigour of the [Augustan] humanist ethical world is that human nature be conceived as both historically and empirically uniform. To the humanist it is fixed, stable and objectively knowable; and it always has been [...] The humanist satisfaction with the idea of fixed artistic genres [derives from] the presupposition of the uniformity of human nature.' (pp. 54, 66).

Miller's generic oscillation, is not constrained to his fictional writing – it also informs his folkloric study. *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland* is an eclectic piece of work with religious theorising and national history mingling with superstitious tales and pagan customs. One chapter devotes itself to a short story while the next contains an analysis of modern Whiggism. The episodic structure of the 'history' allowed Miller to insert fragments of tales and scholarly analysis where he saw fit and the discursive passages are clearly meant to appeal to Miller's intellectual audience. However, the effect can be incongruous and the discussions are often laboured and misplaced. James Robertson has described the interchangeable nature of Miller's book:

We find the personal mixing up with the public, fact mixing with mythology, oral tradition and folklore mixing with documented history to a remarkable degree. Think of the title of his 1835 volume *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland or The Traditional History of Cromarty*. That word: *or* is quite an odd one, as if the north of Scotland and Cromarty are interchangeable. Is *scenes and legends* just another way of saying *traditional history*, and what does he mean by that phrase?¹³

Robertson is never really able to fully answer his own question. Yet his approach is an exemplary one. Stripped of the guidance of genre, as a quantifying measure of analysis, the critic must return to the most basic enquiries; why did Miller write *Scenes and Legends*? And what does the book have to say?

The answer is twofold, and perhaps even contradictory. Miller wanted to issue a book that could secure him a place in the literary market and he borrowed, once more, from literary models in shaping his own project. This time the model was the antiquarian collections of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Possessing a wealth of antiquarian knowledge from his uncles, and having been steeped in the traditional folklore of his community for over twenty-five years, Miller conceived the idea of

¹³ James Robertson, 'Scenes and Legends of the North: feeding a youthful imagination' in *Hugh Miller in Context*, (see Borley, above), pp. 17-26 (p. 17).

writing a book modelled on the success of Gilbert White's *Natural History and Antiquaries of Selbourne* (1789) illustrating the peculiarities of his own 'obscure parish' of Cromarty.¹⁴ However, Miller's adherence to the antiquarian model was partial, to say the least. Structurally, it diverges into countless didactic, philosophical, political and religious digressions. Thematically, *Scenes and Legends* betrays a quite different treatment of its traditional subject than the conventional antiquarian study.

Dorson, in his discussion of Miller in *The British Folklorists*, recognises the practical aim behind Miller's 'traditional history': 'This work was intended by Miller to launch a promising literary and intellectual career [...] Young Miller had high aspirations, and enjoyed local celebrity in Cromarty for his learning, but he sought a larger audience.'¹⁵ But if Miller was to attract a larger audience then it would be necessary for him to write a work capable of attracting the literary audiences of the time. 'This larger ambition', Dorson continues:

explains the inconsistencies in the book, which records grim folk belief and rude dialect in company with artificial literary passages describing emotions and landscape. Miller wished to take his place in English literature, by virtue of a book on folklore.¹⁶

Dorson here recognises one of the key difficulties in defining Miller's *Scenes and Legends*. It both attempts to model itself on the popular antiquarian collection whilst at the same time advertising Miller's more expansive intellectual gifts in order to attract the attention of the *literati*. Although Miller had been producing literary pieces for some time, in his submissions to *The Inverness Courier*, *Wilson's Tales* and *Chamber's Journal*, these were occasional works and did not offer the kind of financial remuneration that would enable him to abandon masonry for a career in literature. In a

¹⁴ Miller cites this model in his letter to Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, LB54 (March 1833).

¹⁵ Richard Dorson, *The British Folklorists*, p. 141.

¹⁶ Richard Dorson, p. 141.

letter to Lydia's mother in 1833, Miller described his wish to realise a literary career by means of his traditional history:

There is one plan, however, which is rather more a favourite with me than any of the others. I think I have seen men not much more clever than myself, and possessed of not much greater command of the pen, occupying respectable places in the ephemeral literature of the day as editors of magazines and newspapers, and deriving from their incomes of from one to three hundred pounds per annum. A very little application, if I do not overrate my abilities, natural and acquired, might fit me for occupying a similar place, and of course, deriving a corresponding remuneration. But how push myself forward? Simply in this manner. I have lately written, as I dare say you are aware, a small traditional work, which I have submitted to the consideration of the literati of Edinburgh, and of which they have signified their approval, in a style of commendation far surpassing my fondest anticipations. I shall try and get it published. If it succeed in attracting any general notice, I shall consider my literary abilities, such as they are, fairly in the market.¹⁷

Scenes and Legends proved a cumbersome vehicle in getting Miller exactly where he wanted to go. He found difficulty in securing a publisher, resisting the idea of subscription in the same way he had resisted financial patronage. But eventually, for lack of alternatives, Miller finally agreed to renounce his defensive independence and entered into a subscription agreement with Adam Black some time in 1833. In the years prior to publication, Miller penned several letters to potential patrons and members of the *literati*, requesting their support. It was necessary for Miller, once more, to have recourse to supplication; to try to win sympathy whilst maintaining his status as a self-reliant working man, whose literature demonstrated the fruits of self-education and endeavour.¹⁸ In the meantime, Miller continued to re-work and refine his materials, writing that 'if ever my Traditions get abroad they will be all the better

¹⁷ Hugh Miller, letter to Mrs Fraser, LB76 (2 November 1833).

¹⁸ For example, Miller's letters to Allan Cunningham: 'Forgive me that I apply to you. I am a pilgrim, passing slowly and heavily along the path' (LB102) and to Sir George Mackenzie: 'Permit me to submit to your judgement [...] I am one of the class almost peculiar to Scotland who became conversant with in some little degree with books and the pen amidst the fatigues and privations of a life of manual labour.' LB105.

for having stayed so long at home.’¹⁹ The book did achieve some favourable reviews, but it made its way slowly. By 1850, however, it justified re-issue and, despite the advice of his first publishers to edit large sections, Miller actually added fresh material drawn from his early writings in earlier *Chambers’s Journal*, as well as some unpublished pieces.

Miller’s particular adoption of the antiquarian genre was contrived around a distinctive ideological purpose. His intention was to utilise traditional oral and storytelling modes so as to recapture the past, not in the authoritarian tones of the classical antiquary but, crucially, in the popular voice. Miller’s history was intended to stimulate both an interest in traditional ways and beliefs whilst encouraging the authority of the oral, folkloric narrative. In this, Miller did not adhere to the fashionable nostalgia for the past, nor the antiquarian habit of dressing traditional lore in the popular idioms of the present. Whilst *Scenes and Legends* certainly evinces a desire to maintain a record of Scotland’s traditional history, Miller, in fact, wishes to re-introduce the integrity of past values (particularly those of community, feudal benevolence and shared tradition) to the present times.

It is possible that it is the folkloric style of Miller’s early prose fiction that motivates his retraction from the creative ownership of his tales, in the style of the traditional *sennachie*. However, his recurrent deference to other, established, writers also suggests a degree of creative anxiety. The reasons for this can only be speculative: it may be that Miller, as a relatively unknown working-man writer was experiencing the anxiety of issuing his creative voice. It may be too that as a recently converted Evangelical Presbyterian Miller felt uncomfortable with the moral status of the fictional enterprise. The generic oscillation of these early works also reveals, on

¹⁹ Hugh Miller, letter to Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, (to whom he dedicated *Scenes and Legends*), LB87 (June 1834).

occasion, the uncomfortable mixture of Miller's pragmatic and ideological aims (the desire to demonstrate intellectual facility in the didactic and speculative passages of the short fiction, the commercial utilisation of the established antiquarian model as a means of delivering a folkloric project). Within the writing itself, however, the permeable line between notions of fact and fantasy, memory and fiction, history and legend and the concrete and the ethereal appear to derive from Miller's inheritance of a peculiarly synthetic and supple folkloric tradition. The classical hierarchy received from the conventional literary tradition is radically dissolved in these early works and the systems of power and authority imputed within such classification implicitly challenged, notably in an ostensibly antiquarian historical discourse that treats of the neglected oral folklore of the working people of Scotland.

Themes

Miller's fiction and the later *Scenes and Legends* share several thematic preoccupations. In these early works Miller is concerned with the articulation of the peripheral voice and with the exploration of traditional beliefs and folklore which he perceived to be increasingly threatened in the wake of the sceptical modern, industrial age. In Miller's early fiction his protagonists are typically the soldier, the shipmaster and the self-made merchant and the outcast, the gypsy, the poet and the wanderer. His stories tell of the noble adventures of those raised from humble birth and the often tragic tales of humble lives. The Fergusson and Burns of Miller's tales draw their fictional value, not from their literary success, but from Miller's interest in the figure of the neglected poet struggling on the margins of literary acceptability. The figure of the self-educated but neglected man is, perhaps unsurprisingly, a recurrent one. 'The Salmon Fisher of Udoll' is a self-educated, working man and a struggling poet (his

name, Allan Thomson, is comprised of ‘twa namesakes – he o’ “The Seasons” and ‘he o’ “The Gentle Shepherd”’ (*T&S*, 134)) and the story recounts the ill-fated love affair between the humble working man and the young woman whom poverty prevents him from marrying. Lydia was not unaware of the autobiographical references of these three tales, observing that they, in particular, revealed ‘glimpses into [Miller’s] own inner life’.²⁰ Miller’s tales tended to narrate those elements of the human condition with which he empathised. The mental breakdown in the character of Fergusson, and of Allan Thomson at the ending of ‘The Salmon Fisher of Udoll’, the neglect recurrently shown to men of humble birth, and the portrayal of death and grief in ‘The Widow of Dunskaith’ and ‘The Lykewake’ could all be read as drawing from Miller’s own experience. In the same way, Miller is concerned to narrate the triumphs and adventures of the self-made man. He notes how the orphaned gypsy, Bill Whyte, educates himself during the long voyage to Egypt and that the successful Scottish Agent, George Ross was the son of a ‘petty proprietor’ inheriting only ‘the few barren acres on which [...] his family had been ingenious enough to live’ (*T&S*, 262), and that Kenneth McCulloch, the celebrated inventor of the sea-compass, was born in a ‘rude shelter’, the son of a farmer from ‘a race of honest, plodding tacksmen’. (*T&S*, 275) In these tales the characters evince much of Miller’s own personal concerns and motivation. He draws his protagonists as energetic, self-reliant and – crucially – independent, men. In this, Miller is delineating the prototype of the self-governing working man that he will later promote in his socio-political writing, in essays such as ‘An Unspoken Speech’, ‘The Franchise’ and ‘Our Working Classes’.²¹ While he did not seek to revolutionise the political structure (several of his writings actually endorse the

²⁰ Lydia Miller, ‘Preface’, *Tales and Sketches*, p. vi.

²¹ Hugh Miller, ‘An Unspoken Speech’ (*The Witness*, 14 December 1850), ‘The Franchise’ (*The Witness*, 7 June 1848), ‘Our Working Classes’ (*The Witness*, 17 June 1854).

principle of benevolent aristocracy),²² he advocated an ‘aristocracy of the people’ enabled ‘through their superior intelligence to give a weight and respectability to the popular party which it could not otherwise have possessed’.²³

The wisdom of uneducated folk was to become a significant theme throughout Miller’s work. *Scenes and Legends* in 1835 was Miller’s attempt to articulate the voice of history from the popular perspective. In the opening chapter he states his intentions:

Human nature is not exclusively displayed in the histories of only great countries, or in the actions of only celebrated men; and human nature may be suffered to assert its claim on the attention of the beings who partake of it, even though the specimens exhibited be furnished by the traditions of an obscure village. (*S&L*, 9)

Miller’s ‘traditional history’ sought to focus, not on the Great and Heroic, canonised in conventional historical record, but on local lives and everyday experience. As such Miller’s *Scenes and Legends* radically championed the integrity of the non-authoritative, peripheral voice. At the outset of the book, Miller balances the values of established and traditional forms of knowledge. He asserts both the value of a classical education but, at the same time, warns against the neglect of an older, folk wisdom. Miller’s thesis is that the abstractions of philosophy, without intuitive feeling, produce a barren intellect, whilst gullible credulity, unenlightened by the lessons of science and the arts, engenders superstitious ignorance. Reconciling these claims, he writes: ‘My greatest benefactors have been the philosophic Bacon and an ignorant old woman, who, of all the books ever written, was acquainted with only the bible.’ (*S&L*, 1) In a non-conventional history, which draws on the sources of memory and belief, Miller asserts the validity of a folkloric, as opposed to a purely academic, library.

²² In ‘A True Story of the Life of A Scotch Merchant of the Eighteenth Century’, Miller endorses the role of the benevolent feudal leader: ‘The feudal superior of the town, and proprietor of the neighbouring lands, formed, of course, [the town’s] natural and proper head.’ (*T&S*, 306) In a similar manner he wrote to his patron, Miss Dunbar of Boath: ‘Give me an aristocracy of Miss Dunbars, and we shall have no Revolution for a century to come.’ (LB82 [14 February 1834])

Old greyheaded men, and especially old women, became my books; persons whose minds, *not having been pre-occupied by that artificial kind of learning which is the result of education*, gradually filled, as they past through life, with the knowledge of what was occurring around them, and with the information of people derived from a similar cast with themselves, who had been born half an age earlier. (my emphasis: *S&L*, 2)

The reference to books and education as non-institutional pursuits serves to qualify the validity of establishment learning, and, by implication, the principles of established thinking. Miller is suggesting here the empirical value of a simple existence and the integrity of ancient, received wisdom. His aim, to record the history of those not celebrated by status or renown, will emphasise instead the local experience of history and the popular hero.

Dorson's twentieth century history of British folklore acknowledges the importance of *Scenes and Legends* in recording folk impressions of history, asserting as late as 1968 that: 'the historical legends which Miller gathered with equal zest still remain virgin territory.'²⁴ Just as Carlyle refracts his narrative gaze to the minutiae of the people in *The French Revolution* (1837), Miller views history through the intimate perspective of his Cromarty community. Miller's local detail fleshes out the scaffolding of historical fact, drawing the reader into a narrative populated by distinctive local characters. *Scenes and Legends* establishes a cast of 'local heroes' and it is their stories that give the book much of its narrative interest. Miller was a shrewd observer of character and his portraits possess an ironic and affectionate humour. 'Morrison the Painter' is a fine example of Miller's gentle wit and surety of touch in rendering the eccentricities of his subjects.

Morrison, some sixty or seventy years ago, was a tall, thin genteel looking man, who travelled the country as a portrait and miniature painter [...] Geniuses were eccentric in those days, and gentlemen not very moral; and Morrison in his

²³ 'A True Story of A Scotch Merchant of the Eighteenth-Century', *Tales and Sketches*, p. 311.

²⁴ Richard Dorson, *The British Folklorists*, p. 148.

double capacity of genius and gentleman, was skilful enough to catch the eccentricities of the one class and the immorality of the other. He raked a little and drank a great deal, and when in his cups said and did things which were considered very extraordinary indeed. (*S&L*, 230-1)

The characters featured in *Scenes and Legends* endow the history with a narrative unity. We are first introduced to Donald Millar in his 'wars with the sea,' depicted as an almost prototypical portrait of the resourceful common folk, and whom Miller commends as a 'good old man of the good old school'. He cites too the legendary tales of his ancestors; John Feddes, the buccaneering shipmaster, and the Highland Covenanter, Donald Roy as well as the prophetic Brahan Seer, Kenneth Ore, illustrative of the religious intensity and ancient mysticism of an older, pre-Enlightened Scotland. Other characters appear as representatives to a historic period; the story of James Fraser of Brae is intended as a heroic exemplary narrative of the outlawed Presbyterian during the Reformation. Dallas Urquhart characterises the moral indecision of the wavering Catholic fearful of standing for his new Presbyterian values, and he is set against the heroic figure of the ousted Presbyterian minister, Hugh Anderson. Donald Sandison figures as the local tradesman, and later, the town's respected leader. As the narrative time-scale proceeds through the Reformation to the Union of the Crowns and Culloden, ending in the 'civilising age of the eighteenth-century', Miller draws these 'characters' together so that the complex social and historical transitions of northern Scotland are illustrated by the intimacy of a community narrative; trade becomes represented by John Feddes, religion by Hugh Anderson and leadership by Sandison. In this way, Miller is enabled to endow his traditional history with a genuine sense of the local and the personal.²⁵

²⁵ Drawing on the 'popular' associations of traditional culture Miller's study also contains several stories concerned with the lives of self-made men. There is the physician, Dr Hossack 'dependent in his earlier years for a precarious subsistence on the charity of a few distant relatives' (*S&L*, 412) and Mr Hamilton, 'the puir orphan' who rises, by his own effort to become a legal advocate. William Forsyth who, 'though

Traditional Culture and the Supernatural

As well as its popular focus, *Scenes and Legends* demonstrates a concern with the integrity of local, traditional culture. Miller retains the authoritative English idiom in his narrative voice, but the book also contains a good deal of vernacular Scots. Similarly, the book brings together a whole body of customary lore and traditions relating to the local landscape. Miller traces traditions relating to the names of the Sutor Mountains, of the Caithness-man's Leap, of the Grey Cairn and the ancient mythologies that they reveal. But perhaps the most significant cultural preservation at work in Miller's *Scenes and Legends* is his gathering of a vast body of traditional supernatural material. In his book tales of pagan belief, of fairy worlds, of myths associated with mermaids, stories of witches such as Stine Bheag o' Tarbert, or the tales attaching to the Fiddler's Well, sightings of the mysterious Green Lady and of countless apparitions and spectral visitations crowd the pages. Miller's history is also a history of traditional belief. Dorson's comment regarding this kind of material is revealing. 'Historical and humorous tradition he treated more scrupulously', he observes, while 'supernatural incident [...] tended to stimulate his fancy.'²⁶ If the historical time-line of *Scenes and Legends* provides an opportunity for Miller to divulge his political and religious opinions, then the supernatural material of the book certainly indulges his own private fascination.

the son of a man who had once worked as a mechanic, [later] took his well-merited place amongst the aristocracy of the district' (*S&L*, 411) is featured in the book, as is James Ross who 'entered life as a common sailor' (*S&L*, 411) and rose to a position of command in the navy while Dr James Robertson, Professor of Oriental Languages at Edinburgh University is noted as having come from a local and 'humble parentage' (*S&L*, 411).

²⁶ Richard Dorson, *The British Folklorists*, p. 143.

In the same way, Miller's early fiction features countless references to fairies, omens, apparitions and spectres.²⁷ Nevertheless, Miller maintains the position of ambivalence which is to characterise all his treatments of the supernatural subject. Miller was aware of the stigma attached to traditional belief – a disparagement ironically illustrated in his wife's 'Preface' to *Tales and Sketches*, in which she offers a somewhat back-handed apology for Miller's material. Discussing the superstitious content of 'The Lykewake', she observed that: 'The sort of literature revived or retained in 'The Lykewake' there are a great many good people who think the world would be better without.' Lydia appears inclined to agree with the clergyman that she overheard giving the verdict that Miller's fairy tales "may serve to show us the blessings of the more enlightened times in which we live, when schools for the young, and sciences for all ages have banished such things from the world"', and she finally proposes that the sensible conclusion is 'to let the matter rest'.²⁸ Here Lydia is expressing that tone of educated disapproval which prevailed in the nineteenth-century literary middle classes. It is Miller's subsequent self-education and gradual elevation in social standing that appear to have influenced his later reservations in regarding the traditional culture in which he had been raised. If he possessed a native fascination with the tales of his own community, the benefits of education meant that he also attained a sceptical detachment in regarding his community's traditional beliefs.

Reflecting on Miller's peculiar detachment in observing his native culture, David Alston concludes that 'Miller remained on the fringes, an observer and not a participant'.²⁹ Nevertheless, when it came to matters of traditional belief, Miller

²⁷ Fairies and omens feature in 'The Life of A Scotch Merchant' (*T&S*, 320-325, 344-5), there is a ghostly visitation in 'The Widow of Dunskaith' whilst the supernatural in general is discussed in 'Recollections of Burns' (*T&S*, 89-90) and forms the subject of 'The Lykewake'.

²⁸ Lydia Miller, 'Preface', *Tales and Sketches*, p. xi.

²⁹ David Alston, 'The Social Context: Cromarty and the Highland in the early 19th century' in *Hugh Miller in Context*, (see Borley, above), pp. 10-17, (p. 14).

struggled between a personal involvement and a desire for academic disinterest. Alston's perception about Miller's observational role leads him to describe Miller's writing as 'sociological' in the sense that it is concerned with an objective analysis of human nature and community. Indeed, Miller is capable of adopting a tone of almost anthropological detachment when speculating on the subjects of native culture and belief. Describing the 'curious traditional anecdotes' of fishermen in 'The Story of A Scotch Merchant,' Miller refracts the narrative voice to a position of speculative detachment: 'Stories of this class may be regarded as the fossils of history; they show the nature and place of formation in which they occur.' (*T&S*, 321) In a similar way, Miller's 'The Lykewake', an account of a visit to a traditional commemoration and blessing of the dead, whereupon several supernatural folk tales are narrated, is framed in broadly anthropological terms. The narrative has a broadly folkloric agenda, in that it preserves a body of traditional superstitious tales. But here, Miller eschews the use of the inclusive pronouns 'we,' and 'our' which typically characterises his omniscient narrative voice. He maintains a personal presence within the story-framework but, this time, the narrative voice emphasises a position of detachment. He introduces the landscape surrounding Cromarty as an educated guide would explain unmapped land.

We had to pass, in our journey over several miles of desolate moor, sprinkled with cairns and tumuli, - the memorials of some forgotten conflict of the past; and we had to pass, too, through a thick, dark wood, with here and there an intervening marsh, whitened over with moss and lichens, and which, from this circumstances, are known to the people of the country as the white bogs. (*T&S*, 171)

Miller does not here relate personally to the inhabitants of his native Cromarty. Upon entering the lykewake, Miller and his companion are characterised as speculative observers, whilst the inhabitants of the cottage perform the role of voicing the beliefs of the community, as here where Miller notes his friend's comments:

“A pretty portrait,” whispered my companion, “one of a class fast wearing away. Nothing more interests me in the story than the woman’s undoubting faith in the supernatural: she does not even seem to know that what she believes so firmly herself is so much doubted by others.” (*T&S*, 177)

And while Miller contributes some of his own traditional tales to the circle of storytellers, the narrative suggests that, rather than sharing local credulity, Miller is gathering supernatural material in the spirit of antiquarian curiosity.

The alibi of academic detachment is again utilised in Miller’s treatment of the supernatural in *Scenes and Legends*. Miller is careful to temper the abundance of his traditional material with a substantial framework of scholarly analysis. In the opening chapters to the book Miller presents an extended analysis of the value of traditional material and the relevance of its study. The discussion is typically equivocal. Miller condemns the primitive nature of superstitious belief, writing: ‘True it is, that superstition is a weed indigenous to the human mind, and will spring up in the half cultivated corners of society in every coming generation’. (*S&L*, 3) Nevertheless, he advocates its record in the traditionary tale, because these beliefs reflect the ‘ever varying garb of custom and opinion’ and, in the rapid changes of the current age, society may ‘never again [...] wear this garb in the same curious obsolete fashion of a century ago’. Miller was not immune to the instinct, common to all ages, to preserve a record of the receding values and manners of the past. He carried a genuine belief that the values of traditional community, represented by his ‘chorus’ of folk figures, and the feudal stability of the country prior to the age of revolutions, were better ones, as Edward Cowan has noted:

Miller did not like what the world was becoming. If tradition had been the cement which bound members of the old communities together its disappearance was

giving rise to urban squalor, freethinkers, radicals, chartists and mindless existentialists.³⁰

Miller's interest in the folkloric record in *Scenes and Legends* was therefore, at least ostensibly, an ethnographic desire to preserve the record an older way of life. Indeed, Miller recognised the anthropological value of folklore long before the science of anthropology came into being or the study of ethnography and folklore gained credence. And while Miller had before him the antiquarian models of Gilbert White and, in Scotland, the folkloric initiatives of Walter Scott, Allan Cunningham and Robert Chambers³¹, his observations regarding folklore were perceptive for their time. He divided his traditional material into 'three great classes' - those relating to actual events, those of invention and those which combined truth and invention. When his analysis of these forms of tale do not descend into the excessive subtleties of theological argument, Miller offers valuable insights into the nature of myth and lore. He was perceptive enough to recognise, without having come into contact with the scholarly folkloric works being developed by the Grimm brothers in Germany, that folklore shared common principles across nations and cultures and evinced a human

³⁰ Edward Cowan, 'Miller's Tale: Narrating History and Tradition' in *Celebrating the Life and Times of Hugh Miller*, (see Borley, above), pp. 76-89, (p. 85).

³¹ By 1835, Walter Scott had produced *his Minstrelsy of The Scottish Border, Consisting of Historical and Romantic Ballads, Collected in the Southern Counties of Scotland; with a few of Modern Date, Founded upon Local Tradition* (1802-3), *The Border Antiquities of England and Scotland; Comprising Specimens of Architecture and Sculpture, and Other Vestiges of Former Ages, Accompanied by Descriptions. Together with Illustrations of Remarkable Incident in Border History and Tradition, and Original Poetry* (1814-17) and *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1830). Allan Cunningham had produced his *Traditional Tales of the English and Scottish Peasantry* (1822) and Robert Chambers his *Illustrations of the Author of Waverly: being Notices and Anecdotes of Real Characters, Scenes and Incidents Supposed to be Described in his Works* (1823), *Traditions of Edinburgh* (1824), *The Popular Rhymes of Scotland* (1826) and *Scottish Jests and Anecdotes* (1832).

It is possible to see elements of Galt's influence in *Scenes and Legends* also. Miller's interest in the community voice and his fears about the passing of community values in the face of rapid modern change invite comparison with Galt's so-called 'theoretical histories' such as *The Ayrshire Legates*, *Annals of the Parish*, *The Provost* and *The Entail*, all published by 1822. The striking similarities between Miller's and Hogg's ambivalent treatment of the supernatural is discussed in Appendix C: 'The Anxiety of the Autodidact'.

tendency towards archetypal mythologies as much as towards any authentic narrative of real events. Thus he reflects that:

Man in a savage state is the same animal everywhere, and his constructive powers, whether employed in the formation of a legendary story or of a battle-axe, seem to expatiate almost everywhere in the same rugged tract of imagination. For even the traditions of this first stage may be identified, like its weapons of war, all the world over. (*S&L*, 15)

And he goes on to parallel the wild legend of the formation of Ben-Vaichard with one told by the natives regarding the formation of an island in the distant African Tonga group. Miller further corroborated his interpretations of tales by reference to classical precedents,³² conferring the authority of learned sources upon his lowly subject matter

Both Dorson and Mackenzie commend the early insights in Miller's analysis.³³ Yet despite his attempts at sceptical objectivity, *Scenes and Legends* nevertheless betrays Miller's heightened receptivity to the subject of the supernatural – which, in his five-hundred page treatise, one cannot dismiss lightly. Whilst recognising the sophistication of aspects of Miller's work, Dorson still refers to Miller's 'own credulity in both supernatural and unusual natural events. Like Andrew Lang, he possessed his own modicum of belief.'³⁴ Miller would never have intentionally betrayed an inclination towards belief. However, an often quoted tale about Hugh Miller and the fairies is certainly revealing. Shortly after Miller's suicide, Robert Dick, the Thurso geologist, is recorded as having voiced the observation that he was:

³² Writing on the legend of the Sluddach river Miller observes: 'We recognise in this singular tradition a kind of soul or Naiad of the spring, susceptible of offence, and conscious of the attentions paid to it; and the passage of the waters beneath the sea reminds us of the river of Alpheus sinking at Peloponnesus to rise in Sicily.' (*S&L*, 7)

³³ Richard Dorson concedes that, 'The recurrence of folktales around the world has borne out Miller's shrewd insight that plots and motifs are easier to borrow than to create' (*The British Folklorists*, p. 151), while Mackenzie concludes: 'It will thus be recognised that at this early period Miller not only discarded a Biblical theory congenial to contemporary understanding, but, further, gave distinct expression to the more modern and scientifically directed induction which followed on the fuller and keener enquiry of later years.' (*Hugh Miller: A Critical Study*, pp. 69-70).

³⁴ Richard Dorson, *The British Folklorists*, p. 151.

not at all astonished at the way it ended. His mind was touched somehow by superstition. I mind, after an afternoon's work on the rocks together at Holborn Head, we sat down on the leese of a dyke to look over our specimens, when suddenly up jumped Hugh, exclaiming, "The fairies have got hold of my trousers!" and then sitting down again, he kept rubbing his legs for a long time. It was of no use suggesting that an ant or some other well-known "beastie" had got there. Hugh *would* have it that it was "the fairies!"³⁵

In the same manner David Masson's account of Miller recalls:

He never speaks of second-sight, nor any other of that class of phenomena, except in the rational spirit of modern science but [...] my impression is that Hugh Miller did all his life carry about with him, as Scott did, but to a greater extent, a belief in ghostly influence, in mysterious agencies in the air, earth and water, always operating, and sometimes revealing themselves.³⁶

It is not only the intensity and scrupulous attention devoted to supernatural material in *Scenes and Legends* that hints at Miller's own credulity. Miller admitted that he had personal experience of the 'inexplicable,' conceding in *Scenes and Legends* that 'humble as my apartment may seem, it is a place of some little experience in the affairs of both this world and the other' (*S&L*, 358) an admission further detailed in his accounts of the apparitions prior to his father's death in *My Schools and Schoolmasters*. Miller's reflections on the position of 'sagacious men' regarding superstitious belief appear, therefore to have particular personal resonance. In the opening to *Scenes and Legends*, he writes:

I have drawn some of my best traditions from [...] shrewd sagacious men, who, having acquired such a tinge of scepticism as made them ashamed of the beliefs of their weaker neighbours, were yet not so deeply imbued with it as to deem these beliefs mere matters of amusement. They did battle with them both in themselves and the people around them, and found the contest too serious an affair to be laughed at. (*S&L*, 8)

³⁵ Robert Dick, quoted in Shortland, *Hugh Miller's Memoir*, p. 75.

³⁶ David Masson, *Memories of Two Cities*, pp. 152-3.

Moreover, commenting on the loss of traditional stories in 'The Lykewake', Miller actually criticises the modern age for its excessive scepticism. 'A cold and barren scepticism has chilled the imaginations and feelings of the people, without, I fear, much improving their judgements'. (*T&S*, 170) Without these, he implores, knowledge is a bloodless imitation of active understanding. In this statement, Miller actually defends the integrity of traditional wisdom and asserts its value in contributing to the great questions of the unseen world, as yet unanswered by science or philosophy. If *Scenes and Legends*, however, had set up a corollary between philosophy and the old wise woman and the bible, the synthesis of this composite understanding is expressed at the book's end. It is tempting to interpret the epiphany of 'a boy adventurer' in the book as Miller's own.

He remembered that when a child no story used to please him that was not both marvellous and true – that a fact was as nothing to him disunited from the wonderful, nor the wonderful disunited from fact. But the marvels of his childhood had been melting away, one after one – the ghost, and the wraith, and the fairy had all disappeared; and the wide world seemed to spread out before him a tame and barren region, where truth dwelt in the forms of commonplace, and in those only. He now felt for the first time that it was far otherwise; and that so craving an instinct, instead of perishing for lack of sustenance, would be fed as abundantly in the future by philosophy and the arts, as it had been in the past by active imaginations and a superstitious credulity. (*S&L*, 339)

Miller's love of the 'marvellous and the true' (it was this third class of invented and true tales to which Miller attached most interest) is reciprocated by the wonders of art and science. And so the equilibrium between the philosopher and the storyteller that Miller advances in his opening chapter is realised in this passage. While Miller has, throughout his book, acceded to the value of the 'terrible poetry' of the supernatural tale – going as far as to compare the power of certain stories with the 'gorgeous creations of the poets' (*S&L*, 407) – he must point the credulous inhabitant of the

supernatural world to the enlightened lessons and edifying beauty of modern science and the arts. In folklore, he suggests there is great art and in philosophy, great mystery.

For Miller, the apparent paradoxes of supernatural and enlightened belief can potentially be resolved. Just as Miller saw no contradiction between philosophy and folklore, so too he perceived little distinction between the supernatural worlds of religion, considered as morally edifying even by the sceptics of the Enlightenment, and those of traditional folklore, considered dangerously heathen. In *Scenes and Legends* Miller claimed that some supernatural tales possess an educational value, serving to show how, 'the cause of manners and of morals must have found no inefficient ally in a deep-seated belief in the supernatural' (*S&L*, 362), and he asserts that supernatural belief can be regarded as an early ideology anticipating the transcendental God of Christianity, writing, 'there are superstitions which perform, in some measure, the work of the devotional sentiment, when the latter is either misdirected or undeveloped'. (*S&L*, 357) In this respect Miller recalls the writing of the Presbyterian minister, Robert Kirk,³⁷ and later eighteenth-century writers who actually defended the existence of supernatural agencies as part of their defence of the theocentric, spiritual world-view. A deeply religious man, Miller was also descended from the line of Scots who had survived the rigours of the Reformation vilification of the supernatural and for whom the spirit worlds and the Holy Ghost still represented aspects of the same world-view. The current critical viewpoint that regards Miller's synchronic avowal and rejection of the supernatural and superstitious as evidence of Miller's 'paradoxical' nature, fails to sufficiently recognise the cultural tensions surrounding traditional belief. As we have seen, by the nineteenth century the literary and intellectual elite had

³⁷ Robert Kirk (1644 – 1691) was a Scottish Episcopalian minister, educated at Edinburgh University and St Andrew's and eventually settled in the parish of Aberfoyle. His *The Secret Commonwealth* (1893), thought to have been written in the years 1690 – 91, argued that the existence of fairies and other supernatural phenomena was not incompatible with a Christian world-view.

abandoned supernatural belief in favour of enlightened scepticism and scientific rationalism. Yet in the peripheral communities of the rural north traditional beliefs persisted. Lizanne Henderson, in her study of the subject of the supernatural in Miller's writing, offers this perceptive conclusion:

Miller was perfectly capable of grieving over the erosion of folk beliefs while, at the same time, applauding the arrival of 'reason' and 'rationality' [...] why the paradox? During this period, there was a strong current against Scottish oral tradition among the educated classes, by whom it was regarded as 'crude' and 'uncivilised'. The best a collector such as Hugh Miller could expect from such an audience was a fascination with the 'primitive', intrigued by 'survivals' of days gone by.³⁸

Henderson recognises that Miller 'walked between two worlds': that of the rural Cromarty man and the educated man of letters. The 'paradox' ostensibly presented by Miller's equivocal stance with regard to the supernatural is in fact contingent upon changing attitudes towards traditional belief in the nineteenth century and the period's own paradoxical temperament of enlightened aspersion alongside romantic nostalgia.

In contrast to Miller's oscillations in genre, the subjects and themes of his writing are remarkably consistent. Miller's thematic concern with peripheral figures and with traditional culture and beliefs, tentatively expressed in the early fiction, is more fully realised in the later *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland*. Once again, Miller utilised a vehicle that could express his thematic concerns in a format appreciable to his literary audience. Borrowing from the literary fashion for antiquarianism, Miller conceived a 'traditional history' which he intended would capture the imagination of his literary audience whilst, at the same time inscribing the experience of a neglected popular voice. Through this project, Miller was able to articulate his concern for the preservation of oral narrative and traditional belief. If

³⁸ Lizanne Henderson, 'The Natural and Supernatural Worlds of Hugh Miller' in *Celebrating The Life and Times of Hugh Miller*, (see Borley, above), pp. 89-99, (p. 95).

Miller was to become increasingly reserved in his expression of the latter theme, it is because his growing literary success perhaps required greater reticence. However, the determination to express a popular voice was to become an increasingly dominant feature of Miller's literary output. It was as an exponent of the popular voice that Miller finally achieved literary recognition.

One of The People: Miller's Epistolary Voice

Although Miller had sought a career in published literature, it was more particularly in the field of 'public letters' that he would achieve recognition and success. The beginnings of a significant 'oratory style' go back to Miller's *Letters on the Herring Fishing* (henceforth, *Herring Letters*); the first of his writing to adopt the epistolary address, which would mark his entrance into public letters with the historic *Letter to Lord Brougham*.

The 1829 *Herring Letters* mark the development of several thematic concerns which persist into Miller's later career. They are concerned with the personal and local and they reveal an early disposition towards the collection of traditional material. This allowed Miller to indulge his interest in the 'curious snatches of the supernatural' that proliferated in the tales of the herring fishermen. At the same time, Miller takes the opportunity to stress the industry and intelligence of the working man. Thus, he observes in Letter III: 'The profession of the herring fisherman is one of the most laborious and most exposed to hardship and danger'. (*HL*, 27) In Letter I, he stresses 'During the era of the herring drove, strange as it may seem, there were fishermen in Cromarty who were no contemptible scholars' (*HL*, 8), and he goes on to relate a tale in which one of the Urquharts of Cromarty addressed a fisherman in Latin and received a reply in the same language. The *Herring Letters* demonstrate Miller's continuing

concern to validate the working experience and redress the prejudices about working people as ignorant and unthinking.

The generic use of the 'letter' was to be important in Miller's expression of these themes. Rather than offering a detached and impersonal report, in Miller's journalism he is an active participant in the narrative. Letter IV, in an evocative piece of descriptive writing, describes Miller's own experience of a night's fishing on Guillian, as a boy. Throughout the letters, Miller presents himself as 'one of the people', expressing an inclusive perspective on local matters:

Should I, Sir, occupy a part of this column in detailing the effects of the change related to the manners and habits of my townsmen, the digression would perhaps be forgiven me. The subject may prove interesting to your readers when they reflect that human nature is the same in cities as in villages, and that the same causes produce always the same effects. (*HL*, 7-8)

The reference to 'my townsmen' throughout the letters implies Miller's shared status as a rural working man. By contrast, the Editor (and by implication the larger reading audience) to whom the letter is addressed, is depicted as Miller's social superior, suggesting a relative detachment from the kind of experiences Miller is describing. In this, Miller demonstrates a critical awareness of the audience that he is addressing. The readership of *The Inverness Courier* in 1829 would have been largely composed of the 'polite society' of the rural north, what Martin Gostwick describes as 'an armchair audience who would never go near a herring boat'.³⁹ The informative analysis and descriptive beauty is intended to appeal to Miller's literary audience, while the self-fashioned role as 'representative of the people' bestows Miller's writing with a culturally authoritative perspective and he utilises this role to express the validity of the

³⁹ Gostwick, Martin 'Hugh Miller and the *Inverness Courier*: [sic] writing that shaped public opinion' in *Hugh Miller in Context*, (see Borley, above), pp. 37-43, (p. 39).

culture he is describing. In addressing his educated audience, Miller combines a tone of deference with an assertion of his empirical authority:

I avail myself of no apology, aware that something could be said both for and against the manner in which I have treated it. I have travelled over the ground a humble pedestrian, but others have not driven over it with the gaiety of equipage; and it is the same circumstances which prevent me from attaining the art of communicating in the most pleasing manner the fruit of my observations on the subject, that have placed me in the best point possible for minute observation. (HL, 48)

Miller's apologies are perhaps intended to invite corrective praise. Miller had, in fact, looked carefully to his literary models in selecting a subject. In *My Schools and Schoolmasters* he describes how he had read of the past-time popularity of the herring trade on 'Grub Street', in one of Goldsmith's essays and was confident of its current relevance to his audience in the north of Scotland. Indeed, *Letters on the Herring Fishing* displays a good deal more confidence than many of Miller's early 'creative' works. As a journalist, Miller was not attempting fiction (there is that same creative deference to established writers here: 'A detail of the disasters and difficulties encountered by these adventurers in their unwonted employment of catching herrings, would form an excellent subject for the pen of Mr Galt or the Ettrick Shepherd' (HL, 18)). Perhaps as a reporter, Miller was more confident in his narrative purpose. The herring fishing accounts maintain a balance between their instructive purpose and an imaginative dramatisation of events. Just as he is able to claim personal experience of his subject and intimate knowledge of the community that he describes, so too is he able to detach from these to offer insightful and reflective observation:

The surnames of the oldest families in [Cromarty] are peculiar to the southern counties of Scotland; and the Gaelic language, though that of the adjacent country, was scarcely known in it prior to the erection of its hemp factory. Perhaps from the peculiar character of the inhabitants, an argument might be drawn in support of this hypothesis. The distinguishing trait in that of the

Highland population of Scotland, is a species of Toryism which connects the lower to the higher classes, and proves that the attachments of the feudal system may survive long after its forms are abolished. (*HL*, 4)

Yet, arguably the most significant feature of the *Letters on the Herring Fishing* is Miller's achievement of a literary voice that is capable of combining the inclusive perspective with detached observation in a manner that asserts both the authority of the writing as well as the integrity of the subject. It is this combination of Miller as both 'one of the people' and at the same time as a literary man capable of writing on behalf of the people that is Miller's most striking achievement. Alston's observation that Miller was 'an observer and not a participant' would be best adapted to acknowledge that, at least in his writing, Miller is observer *and* participant.

Following the successes of the *Herring Letters*, Miller continued writing for *The Inverness Courier*, producing an occasional series of reports from the 'Cromarty Correspondent'. Martin Gostwick, the editor of a collection of these early journalistic ventures, has recognised the dual nature of Miller's literary position, noting that 'his detachment was coloured by a remarkable power of imaginative sympathy with his subjects'.⁴⁰ The final words of Miller's *Herring Letters* demonstrate an awareness of his value as a writer versed in the experiences and conditions which he describes. He was proud, as he told Principal Baird, of having collected his letters' materials from a source 'beyond the reach of a mere literary man'.⁴¹ Miller was an intrepid reporter; he enjoyed the fray of the action and often clambered over cliffs and across land to seek out the tales of local gypsies or the eyewitness accounts of storms, enterprises which, as Gostwick notes, 'were most unusual reporting initiatives at this time'.⁴² However, since Miller was still a mechanic himself, the town's artisans and fisher-folk would

⁴⁰ Martin Gostwick, 'Introduction' in *The Noble Smuggler And other Stories* ed. by Martin Gostwick (Inverness: An *Inverness Courier* Special Publication, 1997), pp. i - viii (p. v).

⁴¹ Hugh Miller, 'letter to Baird', p. 112.

⁴² Martin Gostwick, *The Noble Smuggler*, p. vi.

undoubtedly have seen Miller as 'one of them', and he was able to share in their stories and relate to their hardships. Yet, a literary man also, Miller enjoyed the same privilege of access to the town's social elite, the magistrates, churchmen, merchants, sea captains and their ladies. It was this combination of roles that allowed Miller to write with equal authority on the fishing trade, shipwrecks, local superstitions as well as on Reform Bills, court proceedings, church controversies, and school affairs. Miller's first public writing, then, marked out an important role as an arbitrator between the popular and authoritative classes of society. It was one which would prove invaluable in the development of his literary career.

In 1831, Miller made his first entrance onto the stage of public affairs in the form of a 36-page pamphlet on the Cromarty Chapel Case. A man of staunchly independent thought, Miller was partisan only in his allegiance to the Presbyterian Church. He had studied the writings of eighteenth-century theologians such as McCrie and Erskine and was a devoted admirer of the reformation principles of John Knox. He knew both his Scripture and his Church history and was ready at all times to enter into the fray of ecclesiastical politics in order to defend the democratic principles of Scotland's reformed Church. His involvement with Church matters began, as with all things in the work of Hugh Miller, at home, in Cromarty. In 1831, the minister of the local Catholic Gaelic Chapel, Ian Finlayson, petitioned the Presbytery of Chanonry with the proposal that he should either be assigned his own parish within the bounds of the existing parish of Cromarty, or a collegiate charge with the then Presbyterian minister, Alexander Stewart. The Presbytery was thus presented with two outcomes; that Stewart's parishioners be subject to shared Catholic/Presbyterian authority or that the Catholic portion of the parish transfer to their pastor's separate congregation. But because the parish was almost entirely Presbyterian, and content with their existing minister, there

was almost unanimous protest against the petition. With Finlayson seeking to bring the case to the attention of the General Assembly, an article was undertaken and published in the *Caledonian Mercury*, promoting the Gaelic minister's case. In response, Miller penned a public *Letter from One of the People to the Author of 'Remarks on the Cromarty Chapel Case'* (1831) (henceforth *Letter from One of the People*) as 'the representative of nearly eight-hundred' of his fellow parishioners.

The letter is structured in the mode of declamatory rhetoric, championing the great causes of 'civil and religious liberty'.⁴³ Miller is quick to take up the mantle of the non-intrusion cause and he argues that to uphold Finlayson's request would amount to 'imposing' a minister upon the parish by a system of 'self-nomination'. Miller defended the eloquence and wisdom of the existing minister, Alexander Stewart, in whose discourse 'no inapt [sic] images or absurd conclusions disturb the conviction that the doctrines of Christianity are indeed fraught with the wisdom of God'. He combines democratic sentiments with patriotic rhetoric - a technique utilised later in his *Letter to Lord Brougham* - in a rousing opening statement.

To no man will I yield, at least without a struggle, those rights and privileges which have been bequeathed to me by my ancestors, and which I consider it my duty, so far as my modicum of power renders me accountable, to transmit uninjured to my countrymen of a future age.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, as a champion of the popular cause, the *Letter from One of the People* is also Miller's first statement against the politics of the Radicals 'which in the present

⁴³ Hugh Miller, *Letter from One of the People to the Author of 'Remarks on the Cromarty Chapel Case'* quoted in Bayne, I, 269-272, (p. 270). After an extensive search for the original 1831 publication of this essay, (cited in Michael Shortland's exhaustive bibliography of Miller's works in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science* pp. 301-384), which failed to produce any results, I have had to rely on Bayne's extractions of the letter for my own interpretation. However, a good deal of the *Letter* is recorded in Miller's earlier letter to the editor of the *Caledonian Mercury*, which can be found in Miller's Letterbook, No. 40, pp. 215 – 220, and to which I have turned in order to fill in some of the gaps left by Bayne's account. For consistency, I have noted only the page references in Bayne's account.

⁴⁴ Hugh Miller, *Letter from One of the People to the Author of 'Remarks on the Cromarty Chapel Case'* quoted in Bayne, I, 271.

day infests almost every civilised country in Europe'. Miller is signalling his detachment from radical politics and seeking to emphasise instead a principled plea for 'rational liberty'. He attributes the successes of the Reformation to the side of justice and the destruction of Revolutions to the ineptitude of radicalism. Instead, Miller's cause is one vindicated by history and enshrined in the patriotic associations of the Church of Scotland. The radical appeal, by contrast, continued to strike fear into intellectuals and politicians of the country, and Miller's emphatic rejection of radicalism is doubtless intended to assure his audience that the appeal for popular rule in the Church is a call for 'reason' and not revolt. As he closes, Miller's last words invoke the self-fashioned image of Hugh Miller, champion of the people's cause:

I care not though it be recorded as my epitaph, that when the civil and religious rights of the people of this northern parish were assailed by a hired gladiator of the law, I, one of that people, encountered the hireling on his own field, and vanquished him at his own weapons. For the future you are safe. Should I again appear on the rough arena of controversy, it will be when the barriers are encircled by a deeper line of spectators, and to grapple with some more powerful opponent.⁴⁵

The letter is signed 'One of the People.'

Taking as its substantive subject the interests of the working man, the *Letter from One of the People* is modelled on the eighteenth-century 'Letters of Junius'.⁴⁶ Once more Miller is mediating the dialectic of authority and integrity, the eloquent accomplishments of the man of letters lending credibility to the candid plain-speaking of 'one of the people'. As a result of Miller's *Letter*, the Chapel petitioners were utterly defeated; Miller's final words appear remarkably prophetic. He had created for himself

⁴⁵ Hugh Miller, *Letter from One of the People to the Author of 'Remarks on the Cromarty Chapel Case'* quoted in Bayne, I, 272.

⁴⁶ A series of letters, written by a still unidentified author, criticising the government of George III. They appeared in the *Public Advertiser* between 1769-1772. Speculations as to the most likely authors have included Philip Francis, Edmund Burke and Tom Paine.

a place in the field of public letters as the defiant and eloquent voice of the working man.

It was some years later before the opportunity would again present itself for Miller to rise up once more in the flames of religious controversy. As the decade drew on, the rumblings of discontent in the Scottish Church grew ever more insistent. The issue of patronage came to symbolise the religious conflicts between the radical Evangelical Party and their campaign for spiritual autonomy and the Erastian politics of the Moderates. In 1838, the Court of Sessions sparked new controversy. The Earl of Kinnoul, patron to the Auchterarder parish, had appealed to the Court to reject the parishioner's veto on his proposed minister, the Reverend Robert Young. The appeal was upheld, the Court concluding that 'the said Presbytery are bound and astricted to receive and admit the pursuer as minister of the church and parish of Auchterarder, according to law'.⁴⁷ In response, the General Assembly, incensed at the civil court's refusal to acknowledge the 'spiritual independence' of the Church from state regulation, called upon the House of Lords for a final decision. The two judges presiding at the 1839 meeting of the House were Lord Cottenham and Lord Brougham. They ruled in favour of patronage, advising the Presbyteries to consider only a minister's 'life, literature and doctrine' but not his acceptability to the congregation. The 1834 'Veto Act', which was regarded as securing the parishioners' last right of intervention, was pronounced illegal and the Church bound to observe the civil law.

The Evangelical call for spiritual independence incited a patriotic campaign against an abusive (although perhaps more accurately, an apathetic) British Parliament who refused to acknowledge the integrity of Scotland's religious history and the pledge of her autonomy under the terms of the Union. Feeling ran high in a nation already

⁴⁷ Quoted in A.C. Cheyne, *Studies in Scottish Church History*, p. 111.

stirred by popular movements abroad and impatient to establish the national integrity of an independent Church.⁴⁸ A. C. Cheyne observes that the hostility of the antagonistic forces of Church and state were reflected in the popular feeling of the time.

[The] bellicosity [of Church and Government figures] seems to mirror the confrontational attitudes of an entire society. It was an age of crusades and campaigns - not only the Voluntary Controversy and the Ten Years' Conflict, but also Chartism and Owenite Radicalism and the Anti-Corn Law League as well, an age in which claims tended to be pitched at their highest, and the language of denunciation stretched to its limits.⁴⁹

It was amidst this climate of hostility and popular feeling that Miller issued his oratorical *Letter from One of the Scotch People to the Right Hon. Lord Brougham & Vaux, on the Opinions Expressed by his Lordship in the Auchterarder Case* (1839) (henceforth, *Letter to Brougham*). Miller, once again, is self-conscious in his use of literary role-playing. He opens thus:

My Lord,- I am a plain working man, in rather humble circumstances, a native of the north of Scotland, and a member of the Established Church. I am acquainted with no other language than the one in which I address your Lordship; and the very limited knowledge which I possess has been won slowly and painfully from observation and reflection, with now and then the assistance of a stray volume, in the intervals of a laborious life.⁵⁰ (*LTB*, 1)

⁴⁸ The ecclesiastical controversies of the nineteenth century were not the theological abstractions they now appear. Scotland, and particularly northern Scotland, was still a nation of parish communities, and the minister retained a position of some authority. The Church, whose autonomy had been upheld in the Act of Union, felt itself to be under attack by an increasingly centralised London establishment. The issue of non-intrusion - which held that parishioners ought to maintain the right to choose their own ministers (or at least refuse ministers 'imposed' by patrons) - was a historically vexed question. The Reformed Church had abolished the feudal right of patronage in the *First Book of Discipline* in 1560 and this was reinstated in the *Second Book of Discipline* of 1581. But in 1712, just five years after the Union, the new British Parliament under Queen Anne restored the patronage law. For this reason, 'patronage' was widely regarded as an undemocratic imposition by a British government flouting the terms of the Union and serving to preserve the power and dominion of the feudal Lords and heritors.

⁴⁹ A. C. Cheyne, *Studies in Scottish Church History*, p. 117.

⁵⁰ Hugh Miller, *Letter from One of the Scotch People to the Right Hon. Lord Brougham & Vaux, on the Opinions Expressed by his Lordship in the Auchterarder Case* in *The Headship of Christ and the Rights of the Christian People*, ed. by Peter Bayne, 4th edn. (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1870), pp. 1-22. It is to this reprint of the *Letter to Brougham* that I refer (abbreviated as *LTB*).

By this time, however, Miller had risen in status through his marriage to Lydia Fraser in 1837, was comfortably settled as a bank clerk in Leith and possessed a good deal more than the 'limited knowledge' that his letter indicates. The point of the presentation, was not however, literal self-representation but an appeal to the position and values of the working man, whom Miller is seeking to represent. Here is Miller appearing most overtly as 'one of the people'. Martin Gostwick has defined the dual implications of such a title, "“One Of The Scotch People,” in Hugh Miller’s sense of the term, meant simultaneously a plain working person, and somebody very important indeed. It was a term of pride, not in a ‘wha’s like us’ spirit of bravado, but conveying a sense of honest worth.”⁵¹ The role of the working man was thus an admission of Miller’s relative low status, and, at the same time, a proud gesture towards his authority as a popular representative. It is invoked several times throughout the letter, reminding Brougham of the significance of this authority.⁵² The tone of the letter embraces the popular position; it is ‘our’ Church and ‘we’ who feel aggrieved – as set against the lordly figure of Brougham. In his position as representative of the working people of the Church of Scotland, Miller sets about interrogating Brougham, as representative of the governing class. The tone adopted in his address is therefore both self-assured and deferential; Brougham is ‘My Lord,’ throughout the letter so that the relationship presented is like that of the intelligent courtier addressing his King and this, sometimes in tones of admiration: ‘No, my Lord, I have felt my heart swell as I pronounced the name of Henry Brougham’ (*LTB*, 2), and sometimes in tones of dismay: ‘You have decided against us, My Lord’. (*LTB*, 3) Here Miller is employing the technique of

⁵¹ Martin Gostwick, ‘Hugh Miller and the Inverness Courier: writing that shaped public opinion’ in *Hugh Miller in Context*, (see Borley, above), p. 37.

⁵² As the references progress, Miller increasingly stresses his role as a representative of popular feeling: ‘Now, with many thousands of my countrymen, I have been accustomed to ask, where is the place which patronage occupies in the Church of the people?’ (*LTB*, 7), ‘And these, my Lord, are the feelings of not merely a single individual, but of a class, though less learned, and maybe, less wise than the classes

flattery and attack probably learned from Dryden. Brougham is at first set up as a respected liberal reformer only to be deflated by Miller's suggestion that, in deciding for patronage, he has betrayed his own democratic values. He states the contradiction in no uncertain terms: 'Highly as your Lordship estimates our political wisdom, you have no opinion whatever of our religious taste and knowledge'. (*LTB*, 4) Miller's equivocal tone of deference and authority allows him to attack from two simultaneous positions, with the incredulity of a humble man balking at the ignorance of his superior and, in other passages, with the assurance of a man secure in his status and knowledge of the facts: 'Examine yourself, my Lord. Is your mind free from all bias in this matter?' (*LTB*, 4) and: 'Have a care, my Lord. You are a philosopher of the inductive school. Look well to your facts.' (*LTB*, 10)

Miller deploys several lines of argument to support his anti-patronage case. He quotes from Scripture and from Knox's *First Book of Discipline*. He relates the current controversy to the sentiments of the National Covenant and depicts the Covenanters as noble ancestors in the battle for religious freedom. The history of the Presbyterian Church is emotively enacted in the most picturesque terms.

The long winter was over; the vital principle was heaving under the colds of separate fields and widely distant valleys; the deep sleep of ages had been broken; the day-star has arisen [...] many Churches had been formed. (*LTB*, 7)

Thus from the hovels of their worship emerge the pious communities of Presbyterianism, the fabric of the Church already established by 'bonds of unity.' Citing the scriptures 'Wisdom is justified of her children' (Luke 7: 35), Miller describes how the churches maintained 'their tried and venerable men, whom they had chosen to be their guides and leaders'. (*LTB*, 7) Election from within the people is

above them, are beyond comparison more numerous, and promise now that they are learning to think, to become immensely more powerful'. (*LTB*, 18)

portrayed as an embryonic development from the origination of the Presbyterian Church itself. All this is intended to arouse feelings of patriotism in the Scottish judge, and sympathy for the popular principle. Miller is careful, at the outset of his appeal, to depict a non-threatening picture of the popular movement, inspired by godly devotion rather than political ambition. Yet, in aligning the anti-patronage cause with the great liberties of the reformation, Miller nevertheless implicitly advises Lord Brougham that his objections weigh no more 'than if it had proceeded from the puniest sophist'. The cause, Miller is warning, is far more powerful than the man who stands in its way.

Point by point he argues against the objections of Brougham and the judges of the Auchterarder case. His theological reasoning is presented in the most logical and edifying terms. Building from the base of Church history to the more subtle argumentation of its theological design, Miller draws his conclusion towards the assertion of one vital point.

Christianity in its primitive integrity is essentially a popular religion and what we complain of in the churchmen opposed to the popular voice, is that they have divested it of its vital principle. (*LTB*, 13)

His recurrent reiteration of that term 'popular' as the basic value of the church subtly reinstates his association of non-intrusion with democratic liberties. His self-positioning as 'one of the people' throughout the *Letter to Brougham* allows him to champion that popular cause and set himself up as an exemplary representative of Evangelical feeling.

I am one of the people, full of the popular sympathies, - it may be, full of the popular prejudices. To no man do I yield in the love and respect which I bear to the Church of Scotland. I never signed the Confession of Faith, but I do more, - I believe it. (*LTB*, 18)

Here, he voices the piety of the plain working man, unthralled to petty state affairs but loyal to his Church and committed in his faith. This is not only a proclamation to Brougham, but to the public at large, an epistolary propaganda intended to strengthen the resolve of the Evangelical who is invited to take up Miller's mantle. Brougham, by contrast, is depicted as a self-deceiving statesman who has turned on his own privately held convictions in the name of petty politics.⁵³ As Miller's declamatory voice becomes ever more strident, the rhetoric accumulates from simple fact to more vivid and emotive language. And as the *Letter to Brougham* draws to its climax, Miller offers a final warning as to the power of popular feeling.

And these, my Lord are the feelings not merely of a single individual, but of a class, which though less learned, and maybe less wise than the classes above them are beyond comparison more numerous, and promise now that they are learning to think, to become immensely more powerful. (*LTB*, 18)

These politicised words invite the threat of popular revolt, a threat which, ever since the Revolutions in France and America, the British establishment greatly feared. In a prophetic warning Miller cautions that if the non-intrusion clergymen are forced to give up their livings over this question, then the Establishment will inevitably fall. The prose becomes increasingly adversarial as Miller states the case in ever more confrontational terms.

The Church has offended many of her noblest and wealthiest, it is said, and they are flying from her in crowds. Well, what matters it? – let the chaff fly! We care not though she shake off, in her wholesome exercise, some of the indolent humours which have hung about her so long. The vital principle will act with all the more vigour when they are gone. (*LTB*, 21)

⁵³ Miller is subtle in this most personal attack, only implying the identity of Brougham in the depiction of the unnamed statesman: 'There is my Lord, a statesman of the present day, quite as eminent as Bolingbroke, who is acting, it is said, a somewhat similar part. It is whispered that not only can he decide according to an unpopular and unjust law, which he secretly condemns, but that he can also praise it as good and wise, and stir up his friends (men of a much narrower vision than himself), to give it full force and efficacy; and all this with the direct view of destroying a venerable institution on which this law acts. Now, I cannot credit the insinuation, for I believe that the very able statesman alluded to is an honest man, but I think I can see how he *might act* such a part, and act it with very great effect'. (*LTB*, 17)

This powerful image is the climax to the continuing metaphor of a 'spiritually sick' Church. The personified institution is seen to rise up against her oppressors in an act of supreme power. In his closing words, Miller issues a final warning: 'The reforming spirit is vigorous within her, and her hour is not yet come.' (*LTB*, 22) The 'final hour' suggests an apocalyptic moment of judgement both in a spiritual and a real sense: the outraged Church is ready to cast off the laws which inhibit her. In 1839, the *Letter to Brougham* was brought to Edinburgh where it was passed into the hands of one Robert Candlish. In the conviction and rhetorical force of Hugh Miller, the Evangelical party had found the voice they had been seeking and Miller was promptly invited to Edinburgh to take the Editorship of the party newspaper that would come to be known as *The Witness*.

The *Letter to Brougham* is the most confident of all Miller's early writing, prior to the editorship of *The Witness*. The rhetorical voice is assured, betraying little of the reliance on established literary models that inhibits his earliest work. In his public letters Miller is able to eschew the anxiety of invention. Where his early fictional and folkloric writing tends to rely on the alibis of other writers and the claims to didactic and scholarly instruction, in his journalism, the alliance between discursive essay and imaginative narrative is justified by the events at hand. Rather than oscillating between genres Miller's diverse voices are contained and directed in the defined enterprise of reporting. Miller, it appears, required directional focus in his writing. In mediating the claims of literary authority and the integrity of his ideological purpose, the 'public letter' provided a 'plateau' upon which Miller could combine these values as 'representative of the people,' a position conferring both authority and ideological

validity. Furthermore, the claims of the religious cause by which Miller entered into public writing provided Miller with a target, a focus for his rhetorical capacities. Abandoning the crutches of his literary models, Miller begins to assert an independent and self-assured literary voice. The weight of his literary alibis is replaced by the gravity of a Great Cause. From this point forward, Miller's literary voice would gain its authority, not from a reliance on established models, but from the consequence of his moral and spiritual integrity.

Chapter Seven:

The Voice of *The Witness*

The Witness and Literary Ambitions

In June of 1839 Reverend Robert Candlish found in the writing of Hugh Miller a voice capable of capturing the imagination of the Scottish people to whom the Evangelicals spoke. Candlish described to Lydia of his first impressions in reading Miller's *Letter to Brougham*: 'We had been looking out for an editor [...] I came at once to the conclusion that we had found the man.'¹ Miller was invited to Edinburgh and offered the position of editor to the newspaper that would come to be known as *The Witness*.

At that time, of the sixty-three newspapers then published in Scotland, only eight supported the non-intrusion cause.² The Evangelicals desperately needed to widen their popular appeal and Miller had himself proclaimed his position as a representative man of the people of Scotland. Miller, however, was uncertain about the proposition. His literary ambitions did not lie within the journalistic field, which he considered a poor relation to the great philosophical and literary works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As early as 1829, in the first flush of youthful ambition, he had rejected the opportunity of a career in newspaper editing. In his note 'To the Reader' in *First Impressions of England* in 1847 he describes reporting as 'a very humble attainment' and laments that his *Witness* reporting is often 'struck off for the passing day' when he longed to contribute to the 'pages of higher pretensions written for tomorrow' (*FI*, vi.). In his autobiography it is with an air of regret that he reflects on his decision to become an editor:

¹ Robert Candlish quoted in Bayne, II, 180-1.

² James Mackenzie and Robert Rainey, *Life of William Cunningham, D.D.* (London, Nelson, 1871), p. 135.

I had once hoped – though of late years the hope has become faint – to leave some little mark behind me in the literature of my country; but the last remains of the expectation has now to be resigned. The newspaper Editor writes in the sand when the flood is coming in. If he but succeed in influencing opinion for the present, he must be content to be forgotten in the future. But believing the cause to be a good one, I prepared for a life of strife, toil and comparative obscurity. (S&S, 529)

For Miller, a journalistic career offered little hope for the kind of literary posterity that he sought. However, the position of newspaper editor in the literary capital would certainly have offered a degree of literary recognition hitherto unknown to him and confer a valuable literary authority upon his writing. With these advantages in mind and with the practical incentive of providing for his family Miller embarked upon his new editorial role.

Prior to 1839 Miller had been only marginally involved in the ecclesiastic politics taking hold in Scotland. His writing, nevertheless, reveals familiarity with the Presbyterian historical works of John Knox's *Historie of the Reformation* (1584), William Maitland's *The History and Antiquaries of Scotland* (1757), Robert Wodrow's *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland* (1721-2) and Thomas McCrie's *Life of Knox* (1812) and *Life of Andrew Melville* (1819). His undeniable reverence for the Protestant Church appears to have been inspired by an idealised conception of the ancient Reforming and Covenanting cause and its romanticised heroes. In the nineteenth century the Covenanters were regarded in the Presbyterian mind as the defiant ancestors of the patriotic Evangelicals with their call for the 'spiritual independence of the Church'. In a *Witness* article in 1847, Miller recalled the image of the Bass Rock, describing its religious associations and the romantic associations with which he held the Covenanting cause.

From the grassy knoll above the hollow I could see the parish churches of two of its other more noted captives, - McGilligen of Alness and Hogg of Kiltarn [...]

My eyes fill as I gaze on it. The persecutors have gone to their place [...] But the noble constancy of the persecuted, the high fortitude of the martyr still live. There is a halo encircling the brow of that rugged rock; and from many a solitary grave and many a lonely battle-field, there come voices and thunderings like those which issued of old from within the cloud, that tell us how this world, with all its little interests, must pass away, but that for those who fight the good fight, and keep the faith, there is rest that is eternal.³

Perhaps most significant, however, regarding Miller's involvement in the Evangelical cause was his meeting with Thomas Chalmers who visited the Millers' home in Cromarty during the last of his Church Extension visits in 1839. Chalmers was to make a lasting impression upon Miller. His benevolent and democratic conception of the Church's role in society appealed to Miller's own ideological stance. Miller wrote frequently in support of Chalmers's policies in *The Witness*, and his writing evinces his great esteem for the Evangelical minister and leader of the Free Church of Scotland. There was, in Chalmers, the quality of the patriarch that Miller looked for in a spiritual leader. His article documenting Chalmers's funeral in 1847 describes a man worthy of 'kingly honours' and who, to paraphrase Miller, represented both the anchor in the seas of controversy and the roots of the growing tree of Evangelicism. Chalmers's St John's experiment (1818-1823) furnished a practical example of his commitment to the values of self-cultivation, industry, religion and charity, values which Miller held as the central tenets of a civilised society.⁴ The description of Chalmers's spiritual and social values in creating the St John's parish by the religious historian A.C. Cheyne might equally be taken as the central values of Miller's own social vision:

³ Hugh Miller, 'The Geology of the Bass' (*The Witness* 24, 27 November 1847, 4, 8 and 11 December 1847). Reprinted in Hugh Miller, *Edinburgh and Its Neighbourhood* 4th edn (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1870), pp. 245-344, (pp. 256-7).

⁴ In the early nineteenth century, Chalmers created the St John's parish in the East-end of Glasgow, an area renowned for its poverty and overcrowding. His intention was to bring traditional features of pastoral care: spiritual administration, poor relief and education to the hitherto neglected industrial areas of Scotland.

Chalmers believed that the two great evils of his day were irreligion and poverty. He also believed that the two were intimately connected, the former being the root cause of the latter. And he contended that the only way of eliminating either was: the revival, within the context of modern industrial society, of the ancient virtues of rural and small town life in Scotland; recognition of a providential ordering, perhaps we should say stratification, of society; unselfconscious philanthropy on the part of the rich, and grateful but never subservient acceptance of it by the deserving poor; family loyalty, sturdy independence; hard work; thrift; temperance; and of course piety.⁵

For Miller and Chalmers the Church had an intimate role to play in the practical arrangements of society and for this reason had an implicit political stance. Miller's fealty to the paternalistic leadership of Chalmers and his socio-religious vision is mirrored in his political allegiances. His respect for leadership tempered by social benevolence led him to sympathise with the liberal and paternalistic agenda of the Whigs. Miller's liberalism was, however, expressly a 'Whiggism of the old school', a system which placed its values in moderation, tradition, education and equality. His 1850 *Witness* article, 'An Unspoken Speech'⁶, expresses to the working classes those very values of self-cultivation, temperance and piety, while in essays such as 'A True Story of the Life of A Scotch Merchant'⁷ he evinces a respect for the good leadership of the landed proprietor. He valued moderate social reform without the destruction of social institutions, and while he condemned the rapacious and selfish landowner he congratulated the progressive entrepreneur and the benevolent aristocrat. In the same way, the Church, Miller believed, in its capacity as a spiritual authority, ought to extend its province to the protection and care of the neglected classes. Just as Miller had fashioned himself as the literary champion of the working man's voice, so too did he deem it necessary for the people to be led from squalor and self-destruction by the moral leadership of a man such as Chalmers.

⁵ A. C. Cheyne, *Studies in Scottish Church History*, pp. 87-8.

⁶ Hugh Miller, 'An Unspoken Speech' (*The Witness*, 14 December 1850).

⁷ Hugh Miller, 'A True Story of the Life of A Scotch Merchant,' private commission for the Forsyth family, reprinted in *Tales and Sketches*.

Apart from his capacities as a religious teacher and leader, Miller equally admired Chalmers's eloquence and his intellectual breadth. Indeed, it is notable that in much of Miller's highest praises for the figures of the Free Church their qualities as writers and thinkers were prized. He described Thomas McCrie as 'possessing an air of romance [...] as a man of letters, which, by exciting our imagination, endeared us to him the more' and compared his literary qualities with those of Crabbe.⁸ In an early *Witness* article entitled 'The Literary Character of Knox' he writes of Knox's *The Historie of the Reformation* that 'there is a dramatic effect in some of the dialogues altogether fascinating and there are touches of such simple pathos in the narrative that they affect even to tears', concluding that Knox 'seemed as if born to anticipate the improvements and refinements of an age yet distant, and this not merely in his knowledge of things, but in his command of words'.⁹ In his reflections upon the life and work of Chalmers, Miller's reference to literary figures is striking. In placing Chalmers amongst the 'great men' of history, his name stands alongside references to Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, Swift, Dryden, Goldsmith, Addison, Cowper, Burns, Scott, Goethe and Wordsworth. Furthermore, in his reminiscences of Chalmers in *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, it is as a poet and thinker that Miller recalls the famous churchman and his *Astronomical Discourses* (1817).

The mind of Chalmers was emphatically a many-sided one [...] I had long been struck by that union which his intellect exhibited of a comprehensive philosophy with a true poetic faculty, very exquisite in quality [...] I had not a little pleasure in contemplating him on this occasion as the *poet* Chalmers [...] The 'Astronomical Discourses' [...] no one could have written save Chalmers. Nominally a series of sermons, they in reality represent, and in the present century form perhaps the only worthy representatives of that school of philosophic poetry to which, in ancient literature, the work of Lucretius belonged, and of which, in the literature of our own country, the 'Seasons' of Thomson, and Akenside's 'Pleasures of the Imagination' furnish adequate examples. (S&S, 531, 533)

⁸ Hugh Miller, 'Dr Thomas McCrie' (*The Witness*, 6 May 1840).

⁹ Hugh Miller, 'The Literary Character of Knox' (*The Witness*, 4 March 1840).

Miller placed a particular emphasis on the literary and imaginative associations of the Free Church leaders and one wonders if his attraction to the editorship of *The Witness* derived, at least in part, from a desire to belong to the great canon of these esteemed literary divines. There must also have been a degree of aspiration towards the literary and moral authority represented by the great Churchmen of past and present (whilst avoiding the trivialities of mere fiction) and an awareness that from his position as spokesperson for the Free Church he would gain an indubitable authority in his declamation upon contemporary social and moral issues.

Thus it was to the Evangelicism and the Free Church of Thomas Chalmers, 'the man of largest mind which Scotland had ever produced'¹⁰, that Miller would ultimately commit his allegiance in agreeing to *The Witness* editorship. Miller's opening articles were avowedly partisan to the 'popular party,' the first issue opening under the banner of Knox's words with Miller stating his intention to both 'guide his countrymen' as well as 'echo their sentiments'.¹¹ Nevertheless, despite Miller's allegiance to the Evangelical cause, *The Witness* evinces a pretty shrewd estimate of party politics both ecclesiastic and political. John Cooke in his study of 'The Social Teaching of Hugh Miller' has observed that *The Witness* was itself characterised by a sturdy independence, a feature probably deriving from the direction of its editor so that in large measure '*The Witness* was Hugh Miller' and partook of his own independent character.¹² With Miller in control as editor, *The Witness*'s prolific output dealt with a growing variety of questions, illustrating Miller's own breadth of interest. As the Free Church editor he was defiant in his resistance to the strictures of religious Party politics. His vision was to combine the ecclesiastic agenda of the Evangelicals with

¹⁰ Hugh Miller, *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, p. 530.

¹¹ Hugh Miller, Untitled editorial on the aims of *The Witness* (*The Witness*, 15 January 1840).

¹² John Cooke, 'The Social Teachings of Hugh Miller' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 1977), p. 11.

genuine social, political and intellectual enquiry. Michael Shortland observes in his survey of Miller's *Witness* writing from 1840-1856:

Developments in Scotland naturally dominate the pages of *The Witness*, but neither England nor Continental Europe is neglected; indeed political, religious and social issues are reported from as far away as India, Africa, China and the Americas. Miller's lively and controversial writings plunge us into the febrile worlds of politics, religion and natural science during a time of radical and far-reaching changes.¹³

The evidence of Miller's independent character suggests that he would have resisted the assumption of a merely organisational role. His thirst for intellectual expression could find voice in the vehicle of *The Witness* newspaper and to a large extent its production over the sixteen years of Miller's editorship expresses the development of Miller's own intellectual and literary career at least as much as it voices the religious politics of the time.

Nevertheless, the importance of *The Witness* to the Free Church cause should not be underestimated. Skilled orators such as Cunningham¹⁴ and Candlish¹⁵ could attract only those that heard them but Miller's engaging and unpretentious prose-style spoke directly to the people and drew many more to the cause of the Evangelicals. The impact of *The Witness* was immediate. In the year 1839-40, the first year of Miller's editorship, the annual petition on behalf of the Non-Intrusion cause increased by some

¹³ Michael Shortland 'Hugh Miller's Contribution to *The Witness* 1840-1856' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above), pp. 287-301, (p. 288).

¹⁴ Dr William Cunningham (1805 - 1861) studied at Edinburgh under Thomas Chalmers. He licensed as preacher in 1838 and was settled as a minister at Trinity College Church in Edinburgh from 1834. In 1847 he succeeded Chalmers as Principal of New College, Edinburgh. Thoroughly a Calvinist in theology, he was renowned for his ecclesiastic learning and combative debating powers.

¹⁵ Robert Smith Candlish (1806 - 1873) was greatly influenced by the preaching of Thomas Chalmers, whose sermons he attended in St John's parish. A staunch adherent to the Evangelical cause, a committed minister and a powerful and persuasive speaker, Candlish was a member of the General Assembly in 1839 when the House of Lords denied the legality of the 1834 Veto Act and he was very nearly successful in his appeal to the Moderate Party to acquiesce in the passing of the Duke of Argyll's Bill, which would have put an end to the intrusion conflict. Alongside Chalmers and William Cunningham he walked out of the Church of Scotland in the Disruption of 1843 and was instrumental in the creation of the Free Church. In 1861 he succeeded William Cunningham as Principal of New College, Edinburgh.

7,000 signatures.¹⁶ The words of Miller's contemporaries bear almost unanimous testimony to his success in arousing public opinion. James Mackenzie, Miller's assistant in the early days of *The Witness*, paid tribute to Miller in his *Life of William Cunningham*, writing that 'no single influence told more mightily on the Church controversy than the influence of Hugh Miller and *The Witness*'.¹⁷ Thomas Brown declared that 'mainly to the establishment of *The Witness* may be attributed the rapid awakening of the people of Scotland to the real import of the non-intrusion controversy'.¹⁸

In examining the subjects of *The Witness* newspaper, one gains an overview of Miller's own primary concerns: ecclesiastic, political, social and moral, (Scottish) national and international. I deal with Miller's scientific writing in the following chapter and consider Miller's views on literature as well as his socio-political and theological thinking in greater depth in Part III. The range of subjects treated in *The Witness* newspaper is diverse and, due to the constraints of space, as well as the particular perimeters of the thesis argument, this chapter offers a broad and summary over-view of Miller's principal concerns; articles dealing with ecclesiastic politics, socio-political affairs, religious and moral attitudes, Scotland and Scots culture and finally, international affairs.¹⁹ This chapter considers those aspects of Miller's thought

¹⁶ Donald Macleod, 'Hugh Miller, the Disruption and the Free Church of Scotland' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science* (see Shortland, above), pp. 187 – 105, p. 193.

¹⁷ James Mackenzie and Robert Rainey, *Life of William Cunningham*, p. 136.

¹⁸ Thomas Brown, *Labour and Triumph*, p. 167.

¹⁹ Due to the sheer breadth of Miller's essay writing in *The Witness*, and the range of subjects treated within it, it is impossible, within the argument of this thesis, to give full consideration to Miller's *Witness* writing. Very little has been published on the subject of Miller's *Witness* contribution, save for a brief, summary essay by Michael Shortland in his *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science* and two articles, one by Iain Maciver on the founding of *The Witness* in 1839, and one by Krisztina Fenyo on the newspaper's treatment of the Highland clearances, published in the conference proceedings of the 2002 International Conference, *Celebrating the Life and Times of Hugh Miller* (see Borley, above). For a fuller analysis of the social, political and religious ideologies disseminated in Miller's *Witness* articles, I refer the interested reader to John Cooke's excellent study 'The Social Teachings of Hugh Miller: With

considered most pertinent to the focus of this thesis; namely, the examination of Miller's public persona, his self-fashioning and developing self-expression. Thus, in examining Miller's ecclesiastic articles, particular consideration is devoted to the issue of Miller's rhetorical combativeness in the field of religious politics. In the area of socio-political analysis, Miller's 'radicalism' is defined and explored. Discussing the religious and moral essays of *The Witness*, the chapter focuses in particular on one article, 'Vision of A Railroad', an essay considered particularly illustrative of Miller's rhetorical range as well as indicative of his religious and moral vision for contemporary society. In 'Scotland and Scots culture' the synthesis of Miller's national patriotism and his approval of British Union is examined and his response to the Highland Clearances considered in light of the general attitudes to Highland culture at that time. Finally, the chapter offers a brief survey of the range of Miller's treatments of international political affairs.²⁰

Ecclesiastic Politics

The Witness articles written from the inception of the newspaper in 1840 to the Disruption in 1843 are naturally dominated by ecclesiastic politics. Miller was fiercely loyal to the democratic principles of an independent Church, and these early essays betray perhaps the most combative of Miller's voices in the early frays of the religious

Special Reference to *The Witness* Newspaper, Contemporary Movements and Theological Influences' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 1977).

²⁰ For a diagrammatic illustration of the subjects treated in Miller's *Witness* articles, see Appendix F. Despite the amount of *Witness* articles dealing with international affairs, I have chosen to give these relatively little consideration as these articles are not considered central to the concerns of this thesis. Miller's main concerns are with the impact of the revolutionary feeling in France and the Turkish and Crimean War. Suffice to say that Miller's criticism of the French Revolution derived from his rejection of political radicalism, considered elsewhere in the thesis. His analysis of the war in Turkey is marked by his Protestant prejudice against Islam. Miller was critical of British intervention in the Crimea as discussed briefly above. Moreover, as there was no such thing as a 'foreign correspondent' working for *The Witness*, the facts informing *Witness* coverage of international affairs were often drawn from the pages of *other* national newspapers (c.f. Michael Shortland, 'Miller's Contribution to The Witness 1840 – 1856', p. 293).

battle. In the leading article to the first issue of *The Witness* on 15 January, 1840, Miller expressed the ecclesiastic opposition between the Evangelicals and the Moderates with the same tone of persuasive and forceful rhetoric that he had adopted in his *Letter to Brougham*. He argued that the popular party represented the 'unchanged' values of the Scottish Presbyterians and were the immediate inheritors of the past heroes of the Church, whereas the Moderates had defected from its traditional values. His closing words make an impassioned plea for the Evangelical cause in terms which set the Moderates in opposition to the inherited doctrines of the Reformation and Covenanting legacy:

Here then, on a distinction as obvious as it is important, we take our stand. The cause of the unchanged party in the church is that of the church itself; it is that of the people of Scotland, and the people know it; it was the cause of their fathers, and the fathers of the Reformation; it is the cause of a pure, efficient, unmodified Christianity. And the cause opposed to it is exactly the reverse of all this. We appeal to the people, to history, to the New Testament. We appeal even to our opponents.²¹

With a sly allusion to the former battles of the Reformation, Miller addresses the Moderate Party:

And would not such of our bitter opponents as profess a high respect for the fathers of our Church do well to remember, that what has already occurred may possibly occur again, and that there once flourished a very respectable party, who when busied in persecuting the prophets of their own times, were engaged also in building tombs to the memory of the prophets slain by their fathers?²²

With these words, Miller outlined the allegiance of *The Witness* newspaper. Its voice was to stand for the Evangelical Party, the Party of 'the people of Scotland' and a Party bound in doctrine to the inherited values of the post-Reformation Protestant Church. Just as in the *Letter to Brougham*, Miller stresses the familial relationship of the Scottish people to their spiritual ancestry, the notion of Church 'fathers' highlighting

²¹ Hugh Miller, 'The Two Parties in the Church of Scotland' (*The Witness*, 15 January 1840).

²² Hugh Miller, 'The Two Parties in the Church of Scotland' (*The Witness*, 15 January 1840).

the necessity of loyalty, not only to the blood relations that had fought in the religious wars of old but in the sense of a national fealty to the principles upon which the Scottish Church was founded. By contrast, the principles of the Moderate Party are depicted as a wayward denial of these true values and a betrayal of the spiritual ancestry.

Antagonisms in the Scottish Church had been simmering for at least a decade by the time that Hugh Miller entered the scene of religious politics in 1840. Inspired by the successes of the 1832 Reform Act, the Evangelical Party expressed the growing desire in Scotland for a democratic principle of representation in Church affairs. Two acts of the General Assembly in 1834 were particularly significant: the Chapels Act, which consolidated the Evangelical ascendancy, and the Veto Act, which allowed parishes to reject-by-majority an unpopular presentee.²³ However, it was in 1838 that the British Court of Sessions upheld the appeal of the vetoed minister, the Reverend Robert Young in the parish of Auchterarder, provoking Miller's first stance against patronage and the Moderate accession to Erastianism. Events very similar to those of Auchterarder were to recur two years later at Marnoch, in Banffshire, when the Moderate ministers of the Strathbogie Presbytery decided that in cases where the Church courts clashed with the civil court they were bound, as citizens, to obey the law. For so doing, they were eventually deposed from office by the Evangelical majority in the General Assembly in 1841. In an article written against the ordination of the rejected Marnoch presentee, the Reverend Edwards, in January of 1841, Miller

²³ The Veto Act and Chapels Act were passed by the General Assembly in 1834. The former was a compromise measure on the issue of patronage, decreeing that ministerial appointments to a parish could be vetoed by popular opinion, without the people being obliged to give a reason. Upon veto, a new presentation was obligatory. The Chapels Act gave '*quoad sacra*' status to existing Churches that lacked parochial jurisdictions. This conferred a new spiritual administration upon parishes allowing, for example, for kirk-session discipline and religious instruction. Ministers and elders of the '*quoad sacra*' Churches could also serve in Church courts, including the General Assembly. It was hoped that the Chapels Act would legalise the position of existing Churches, stimulate new building and, along with the new powers of the Veto Act, encourage secession congregations to return to the Established Church.

expressed his outrage at the audacity of the Moderate Party in a piece of writing which exemplifies some of the chief rhetorical arguments and techniques which Miller rallied to the Evangelical cause. His writing expresses a mood of deliberate foreboding and controlled anger. His opening words are damning about the enforced presentation of the rejected minister upon the people of Marnoch.

On many former occasions have the forms of religion been prostituted to serve every vile purpose: on many occasions has the disguise of profession proved all too flimsy to cover the meanness of the objects which it has been assumed to conceal. But on no former occasion has the prostitution been equally public, or the utter inadequacy of the disguise rendered palpable in the same degree to a circle equally extensive. To the profanation at Marnoch the eyes of an entire community have been directed, and the consequences which it involves affect the religious interests of a whole kingdom.²⁴

With typical rhetorical craft, Miller sets the scene of his emblematic Marnoch tale in a frozen and sterile environment. Utilising the symbolic qualities of a winter landscape, Miller alludes to the choked roads and swollen rivers as if the landscape itself expresses the stifled voice of the Marnoch people, which, like the ice drifts in the river, had ‘sunk undermined in the torrent’. In the Marnoch parishioner’s dramatic exit from the scene of ordination in the parish kirk, Miller depicts ‘old grey-headed men [...] who had worshipped within its walls for more than half a century’, a people ‘in tears’ quitting the Church in which ‘their fathers had met to worship’ and ‘quitting it forever’. ‘Even the “buyers and sellers in the house of God,” – the men to whom persecution is business, seemed awed and impressed for the time. “Will they all go?” they were heard to whisper. Yes, all went!’.²⁵ Again Miller utilises the emotive imagery of a people in duress, a people severed from their spiritual heritage, to draw sympathy for the cause. As well as anger and empathy, Miller would also employ guarded threat. Describing

²⁴ Hugh Miller, ‘The Outrage at Marnoch’ (*The Witness*, 27 January 1841).

²⁵ Hugh Miller, ‘The Outrage at Marnoch’ (*The Witness*, 27 January 1841).

the chaos and anger which followed the Reverend Edwards's ordination, Miller warned:

The parishioners [...] began to express their sense of the sacredness of the service by shouts and hisses, and the flinging of missiles. Assuredly, the secular party may read their future fortunes in the incident, should the same wretched success attend them in their present struggle on a large scale that has attended them in the parish of Marnoch! Miserable, in such an event, would their fate prove: the surges of popular indignation would rise and overwhelm them; and who, among the millions of the empire, would raise an arm in their defence?²⁶

While Miller's voice often expressed threat and condemnation, his most frequent tool of attack was derisive sarcasm and belittlement. In a manner that strikingly recalls John Galt's fictional treatment of the same subject in the opening chapters of *Annals of the Parish* (1821), Miller's depiction of the scene in Marnoch seeks to portray the humiliation and absurdity of the Moderate position. The minister and 'his friends' are portrayed as indecent intruders: 'Mr Edwards and his friends arrived before noon; and after commencing the business of the day with singular appropriateness, by breaking into the manse through a window, they moved onto the church.'²⁷ Miller's personal opponents, the journalists who represented the Moderate position, are also named and ridiculed. In a later article on the same subject he writes of 'the gentlemen of the press chiefly remarkable for holding by no theology at all' but who busy themselves 'in asserting in newspapers and magazines the popularity of their principles'. Yet, according to Miller, after the events at Marnoch when 'the people rose and left the church in a body' the Intrusionists 'were undeceived, and looked somewhat crestfallen. Mr Peterkin found that the author who writes Columns for the Kirk in the *Observer* had

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

deceived him. Another legal gentleman present began to discover that he had been not a little misled by the statements in "Blackwood".²⁸

Miller's rhetorical approach combines such passages of direct attack with a more subtle derogation. The Moderate Party, for example, is named variously by the terms 'the unpopular party', 'the Intrusionists' and 'the secular party'. The Moderate presentee is named only as *Mr* Edwards and never as Reverend. The authorial voice is intrusive, interjecting the narrative with exclamation: 'Ministers of Christ!', 'Yes, all went!', 'Mark the reply!', which indicate a tone of incredulity at the effrontery and absurdity of the Moderate claim to their Marnoch parish. In articles such as these, Miller's voice is impressive and compelling. His utter conviction in the injustice of patronage gives his writings an assurance in the unfailing rightness of his cause. Here Miller evinces the eloquence of sustained attack, in a voice which modulates between compassion, ridicule and intense anger with conviction and assurance.

If Miller's search for voice had long sought a focus for its expression, then certainly it found direction in Miller's role as the outspoken voice of *The Witness*. It is primarily for the bellicosity of his defence of the Evangelical cause that Miller gained his reputation as a writer of ferocious combativeness. Critics are unanimous in acknowledging Miller's militant style. W. M. Mackenzie quotes the words of Dr Thomas Guthrie, who wrote of Miller: 'His business was to fight. Fighting was Miller's delight', an assessment with which Mackenzie agrees.

At all costs he would score; and the spirit that led him to put his ultimate faith in his considerable muscular strength, backed by cudgel or pistol, could not help showing itself in his literary controversy. It is no answer to say that personally and domestically he was the mildest-mannered of men. Torquemada was a man of gentlest temper, yet in the sincerity of his convictions he headed the Inquisition. A more magnanimous frame of mind in Miller might have lasted

²⁸ Hugh Miller, 'Supplementary Notes of the Settlement at Marnoch' (*The Witness*, 3 February 1841).

better, but then it might not have served the immediate necessities of the case. Knox was still the model controversialist of the church militant.²⁹

To this must be added the fact that nineteenth-century periodical writing was much more acerbic than now. The *Edinburgh Review* in particular was renowned for its caustic style. Francis Jeffrey called upon his contributors to 'make war upon the whole tribe of authors and mangle them for the amusement of the public'.³⁰ Miller himself regarded his role as more in the style of the contemporary critic than the prosaic newspaper reporter and in a *Witness* essay revealed that he was indebted to what he described as Jeffrey's 'gladiatorship'.³¹ Thomas Brown concedes that 'when the battle was hottest Miller was a loyal combatant'.³² From the very early days of *The Inverness Courier* Miller had jumped into the fray of local controversy in defence of those he valued. In 1831 he defended his friend the Reverend Stewart against the attacks of Major George Munro whom he publicly denounced as a 'blockhead' and 'a bad man'.³³ In defending his values and those whom he respected, Miller could become vicious towards his enemies. Donald Macleod notes that Miller 'was a formidable polemicist who portrayed Moderates as objects of contempt and Moderatism as the enemy of the Scottish people', continuing, 'if Miller's denunciations of Moderates as a class were biting, his comments on individuals, and particularly on the leaders, were vitriolic'.³⁴ Indeed, in his obituary of Miller in 1856, Dr William Hanna appeared to offer apology for some of the excesses of Miller's attack.

There was nothing in him of the spirit and temper of the sectarian. He breathed too broad an atmosphere to live and move in such narrow bounds. In the heat of

²⁹ W. M. Mackenzie, *Hugh Miller: A Critical Study*, p. 224.

³⁰ John Clive, *Scotch Reviewers: the Edinburgh Review 1802-1815* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 52.

³¹ Hugh Miller, 'Lord Jeffrey' (*The Witness*, 30 January 1850).

³² Thomas Brown, *Labour and Triumph*, p. 165.

³³ Hugh Miller, *Inverness Courier*, 11 July 1838.

³⁴ Donald Macleod 'Hugh Miller, The Disruption and the Free Church of Scotland', in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science* (see Shortland, above), pp. 189-90.

conflict there may have been too much occasionally of the partisan, and in the pleasure that the sweep and stroke of his intellectual tomahawk gave to him who wielded it, he may have forgotten at times the pain afflicted where it fell.³⁵

Hanna perceives the personal rather than dogmatist nature of Miller's bellicosity. In *My Schools and Schoolmasters* Miller described his 'first attempts in the rough field of ecclesiastical controversy' citing the torrent of abuse which his articles aroused and concluding, 'This was frightful! But I not only outlived it all, but learned I fear, after in this way, first tasting blood, to experience a rather too keen delight in the anger of an antagonist.' (S&S, 459). In his analysis of Miller's self-depiction in *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, David Robb suggests that there may be some contrition and apology for the fervour of his polemical attacks within the pages of the autobiography. 'Some of the force of the book's self-criticism', Robb writes, 'is absorbed by the more gentle self-mocking frequently to be found in it, but the more serious view adds up as we read, and the book stands as something of an apology for a rather destructive character trait.'³⁶ Certainly, in his autobiography Miller is keen to stress that he was not drawn into controversy by personal inclination. Writing of his defence of his minister, the Reverend Stewart, in the *Caledonian Mercury* and other newspapers, Miller concludes: 'and such were my first attempts in the rough field of ecclesiastical controversy, - a field into which inclination would never have led me, but which has certainly lain very much in my way, and in which I have spent many a laborious hour' (S&S, 458). Robb is the first critic to have actually examined the critical assumption of Miller's willing combativeness. His appreciation of Miller's character suggests that the harshness that characterised Miller's treatment of antagonists derived from an inherently defensive disposition. One is reminded of the recalcitrant schoolboy who protected his

³⁵ Dr William Hanna, (*The Witness*, 27 December 1856).

³⁶ David Robb 'Stand, and unfold yourself': *My Schools and Schoolmasters* in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above), pp. 246-264, (p. 261).

independence with a clasp knife and who came to blows with the village schoolmaster over the pronunciation of a word, and later, of the poet who delighted in praise and was roused to anger by criticism. It is possible that such excesses were merely a way for Miller to keep his detractors at a distance. Defensive of his precarious and hard-won authority and staunch in his avowal of the principles of democratic justice to which he held, Miller's militant style appears less like the combative jousting of the periodical school and more in the nature of the proud self-taught man who tenaciously holds to his status and values. George Rosie, in his study of Miller, has described the genuine feeling of social outrage that characterises writing not just combative for its own sake but genuinely angry at social neglect and abuse: 'Many of Miller's most telling and powerful pieces of writing were those inspired by sheer outrage at the poverty, misery and injustice he found around him.'³⁷ The confrontational element of Miller's work was not merely a relish for controversy, nor, as Shortland has suggested, a 'literary pose,'³⁸ but is reflective of Miller's unyielding identification with the subjects of religious and social justice upon which he wrote. He viewed himself as a spokesman on behalf of an entire population of the abused and neglected. And in his precarious authority as a self-taught, working man speaking on behalf of his own kind, Miller sometimes viewed himself as the proverbial David battling in the face of an imperious Goliath, an attitude which could lead him into self-defensive violence.

Social and Political Issues

If Miller's primary concern in the early years of *The Witness* was the defence of the Evangelical cause and establishment of the Free Church in 1843, then issues social,

³⁷ George Rosie, *Outrage and Order*, p. 91.

³⁸ Developing his thesis that Miller was motivated by gendered role-playing, Michael Shortland, in 'Bonneted Mechanic and Narrative Hero', suggests that Miller's 'aggressiveness on the pages of *The*

political, cultural, literary and scientific were far from neglected. The causes of democracy and social justice voiced by the Evangelical party in the Church were echoed in *The Witness* by Miller's engagement with the political conditions of nineteenth-century Scotland. Miller could be equally damning about the abuses of landed ownership and poor government policy. I consider Miller's analysis of domestic politics in some detail in chapter nine and in Part III of the thesis. However, as regards the development of Miller's literary voice in his *Witness* articles, a few remarks are useful at this point. In view of Miller's outspoken defence of democracy in Church affairs, critics have expressed surprise at his utter rejection of Radical and Chartist politics. Like Edmund Burke, Miller regarded revolution as an abuse of the sanctity of time-honoured institutions and a refutation of God's ultimate justice. Furthermore, in Miller's view, revolt by force sapped the moral strength of the reforming cause. W.M. Mackenzie is critical of Miller's rejection of socialist and radical solutions, decrying his social critique as 'Carlyle and water'.³⁹ But where Carlyle offered *Sturm und Drang* without practical conclusion, Miller applied the doctrine of Christianity to offer workable, if moderate solutions. It is with some regret that Mackenzie acknowledges the theological bias of Miller's political philosophy:

With the real foundation of truth as to the importance of the part played in later Scottish history by ecclesiastical struggles [sic], there is much that is obviously astray due to the theological squint which is always taking Miller out of the straight path. But, thus informed, we can understand why he never took a very deep interest in civil politics as such; why the religious bearing of state issues always guided his judgement; why for example he "preferred Protestantism to Macauley" [...] It is easy to see now the very pulse of his opposition to Radical and Chartists as they presented themselves to him. The former bore the doctrinal stain of the French Revolution, which had abolished Christianity [...] But to the moral framework of society the Church was the one foundation. For Miller,

Witness [...] was also a warrant of his manliness, which he may well have thought threatened by his adoption of the sedentary occupation of writing'. (p. 34).

³⁹ W. M. Mackenzie, *Hugh Miller: A Critical Study*, p. 196.

organised religion alone stood between the State and the blood and fire of revolution.⁴⁰

There is certainly something of the incredulity of the outraged socialist in Mackenzie's commentary upon Miller although, by and large, his assessments are perceptive. Miller considered Chartism and its sister causes to be a vacuous substitute for religion and it is his doctrinal vision that accounts for his rejection of the purely political approach favoured by the various forms of socialism. Under the Presbyterian presupposition that mankind is fallen, Miller's political vision views a vicious circle in which men, by revolt, move from oppression to revolution and back again to despotism. Although he favoured gradual political reform, his emphasis lay upon individual self-improvement rather than political apparatus. He believed that universal suffrage would be ruinous without the intellectual and moral elevation of the people; therefore, mankind required spiritual integrity as a precedent to political power. In the last analysis, he saw the solution to political and social problems as theological – in spiritual regeneration and a return to the social guardianship of the Church. Miller believed in a natural social hierarchy descending from the divine omniscience of God:

It is according to the fixed economy of human affairs that individuals should lead, and that masses should follow; for the adorable Being who wills that the lower order of minds should exist by myriads, and produces the higher so rarely, has willed also, by inevitable consequences, that the many should be guided by the few. On the other hand, it is not less in accordance with the dictates of His immutable justice that the interests of the few should be subordinate to the more extended interests of the many. The leading minds are to be regarded as formed for the masses, than the masses for them.⁴¹

In this way Miller insisted upon 'those natural barriers which protect the various classes of society', the political power of the people acting as a check upon the possible tyranny of the rulers and the spread of intelligence acting as a security against the

⁴⁰ W. M. Mackenzie, *Hugh Miller: A Critical Study*, pp. 201-205.

⁴¹ Hugh Miller, 'A True Story of the Life of a Scotch Merchant of the Eighteenth Century', *Tales and Sketches*, p. 262.

abuses of the popular power. In this intellectual rather than political security Miller betrayed his conservatism – a sympathy which led him to describe himself as ‘a Tory in feeling, a Tory at least as far as a profound respect for the great and the venerable can constitute one such’⁴² – that is of the paternalistic quality of a Scott or a Chalmers. On the other hand, he was, by his own declaration ‘a Whig in principle’ although he many times qualified this allegiance by asserting that he was decidedly a Whig of the ‘old school’, a ‘Whig of 1689’. As Mackenzie astutely observes, ‘Miller was a Whig on his own lines as Scott was a Tory on his: the latter influenced by his romantic instincts, the former by his ecclesiasticism. The Whig of 1689 was primarily a Church politician, one who sought civil freedom not for itself, but merely as a step towards ecclesiastical freedom.’⁴³ Indeed, Miller’s proposed title for the Evangelical newspaper (later to be *The Witness*) in 1839 was the ‘Old Whig’, signalling his loyalty to the old principles of church government.⁴⁴

Miller’s Tory ‘feelings’ describe an instinct for social order while his ‘Whig principles’ indicate a desire for social justice. In criticising the government’s prevailing apathy towards social inequality Miller made frequent distinction between the notion of law and justice. In an article on rural depopulation in 1856, Miller suggested that so-called ‘criminal’ abuses may be the result of bad laws. ‘Justice and mercy may equally protest against [rural depopulation], but the law is on its side’⁴⁵, he wrote. Miller’s radicalism lay, not in his willingness to overthrow governments or extend the franchise, but in his readiness to condemn the laws which did not have the full weight of popular conscience and justice behind them. Furthermore, it was Miller’s instinct for

⁴² Hugh Miller, letter to Miss Dunbar of Boath, LB79 (16 December, 1833).

⁴³ W. M Mackenzie, *Hugh Miller: A Critical Study*, p. 199.

⁴⁴ Bayne records in his biography of Miller, ‘The name he suggested was the ‘Old Whig,’ and by this name he designated it in his prospectus’. (II, 201) Miller’s choice of title reveals his broadly social and political intentions for the newspaper. The Evangelicals rejected the proposal, however, deciding on *The Witness*, in the sense that the newspaper would testify to the spiritual independence of the Church.

conservation rather than revolt that led him to place such value on the institutions which he regarded as securing social stability: family, community, church, education. For Miller, the ownership of property at best conferred a moral value and responsibility upon the individual. He consistently argued for the retention of a property qualification upon the granting of the vote. Just as in 'Our Working Classes' where he had argued for the elevating effects of good dwellings, so too in 'The Franchise' and 'A Five Pound Qualification' he maintained that those who were responsible enough to save for and retain a property could be relied upon to deal responsibly with the vote.⁴⁶ In his essay on the franchise, typical of Miller's *Witness* writing upon the subject, he utilises the naturalistic metaphors of water and light to contrast the natural laws of the universe with the destructive 'tidal wave of revolution' that has swept over continents. Indeed, it was with the view of forestalling revolt that Miller advocated the gradual reduction of the property qualification.

While the revolutionary hurricane raged wide upon the Continent, dashing into one wide weltering ocean of anarchy and confusion the dense and ponderous masses [...] Britain escaped at least all the more terrible consequences of the storm [...] The Reform Bill in this country stretched abreast of the privileged classes like a vast continent, and would have effectively checked every rising tide of revolution that originated in the country itself. But there lay in the neighbouring states great unbroken belts of the popular ocean, in which the revolutionary wave has risen high [...] It would be at least well to be prepared for a steady setting of the flood-tide on our shores; it would be wise [...] to be casting about for some second firmament, through which a further modicum of bulk and volume might be subtracted from the waters below, and added to the waters above.

But does there exist, we ask, a portion of these lower waters that might be separated with safety? We think there does. The *bona fide* property qualification we have ever regarded as peculiarly valuable, - greatly more so than the mere tenant qualification.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Hugh Miller, 'The Felons of the Country' (*The Witness*, 3 February, 1856).

⁴⁶ Hugh Miller, 'Our Working Classes' (*The Witness*, 17 June, 1854); 'The Franchise' (*The Witness*, 7 June 1848); 'A Five-Pound Qualification' (*The Witness*, 16 February, 1856).

⁴⁷ Hugh Miller 'The Franchise' (*The Witness*, 7 June 1848).

The possession of savings or property, in Miller's view, was indicative of a temperament of caution, thrift and moderation, values which assured against moral, and by implication, political recklessness. In his political view, therefore, liberty was the prize of integrity.

But if Miller was a cautious political reformer then he was nevertheless an outspoken social critic. He wrote countless essays on the subject of pauperism, the abuses of child labour and the inadequacy of working and living conditions. He was damning in his criticism of the failure of the Scottish Poor Law and the scant provision of the poor houses with their punitive and demoralising associations. He was angry about the abuses of inequitable class legislation. In essays on the Horse Racing Penalties Bill, the game laws, duelling and other class-associated activities Miller charged the law with making criminals out of innocent men and with placing class above justice. In an article provocatively entitled 'The Crime-Making Laws' in 1847, Miller opens with his favoured form of attack, the example of absurdity:

If there was a special law enacted against all red-haired men, and all men six feet high, red-haired men and men six feet high would in a short time become exceedingly dangerous characters. In order to render them greatly worse than their neighbours, there would be nothing more necessary than simply to set them beyond the pale of the constitution, by providing by statute, that whoever lodged informations [sic] against red-haired men or men six feet high would be handsomely rewarded, and that the culprits themselves should be lodged in prison, and kept at hard labour, on every conviction, from a fortnight to sixty days. The country would at length come to groan under the intolerable burden of its red-haired men and its men six feet high. There would be frequent paragraphs in our columns and elsewhere, to the effect that some three or four respectable white-haired gentlemen, varying in height from five feet nothing to five feet five, had been grievously maltreated in laudably attempting to apprehend some formidable felon, habit and repute six feet high; or to the effect that Constable D of the third division had been barbarously murdered by a red-haired ruffian. Philosophers would come to discover, that so deeply implanted was the bias to outrage and wrong in red-haired nature, that it held by the scoundrels even after their heads had become bald and their whiskers grey: and that so inherent was ruffianism to six-foot highism, that though four six feet fellows had, for the sake

of example, been cut short at the knees, they had remained, notwithstanding the mutilation, as incorrigible ruffians as ever.⁴⁸

And so he goes on. This is some of the most assured of Miller's writing, when his natural wit and his eye for fallacious authority and institutional irrationality are pitted against the causes of social injustice. Clearly influenced by the social observation and critical wit of figures such as Swift, 'Junius' and the writers of the *Spectator* magazine, Miller had by this time come to possess an accomplished, satiric wit and sharpness of his own. In these articles he is outspoken in his criticism of the laws which make men criminals for a mere infringement upon the privileges of land ownership and elite sport:

It must be a miserable policy that balances against the lives of human creatures and the morals of thousands of our humbler people, the mere idle amusements of a privileged class, comparatively few in number, and who have a great many other amusements full within their reach.⁴⁹

In his essay on duelling he likewise criticises the exception of the upper classes from the regular dictates of law upon the appeal to the old so-called 'chivalric' code of duelling. Upon the same grounds upon which all men do battle - loves lost, names insulted, old animosities enraged - the aristocrat is protected from the crime of murder, Miller argues, under which the common man would be judged without mercy. In another essay of 1847, 'Is Game Property?' Miller goes as far as to interrogate the entire basis of property ownership, rejecting Paley's authoritative definition that 'the real foundation of rights [...] is the law of the land'. Miller is scornful. 'Law of the land! We could as soon believe that a son was the producing cause through which his father came into being', since land and property have existed long before law sought to regulate them. The land and its animals, Miller declares, were originally bestowed upon

⁴⁸ Hugh Miller, 'The Crime-Making Laws' (*The Witness*, 13 February 1847).

⁴⁹ Hugh Miller, 'The Crime-Making Laws' (*The Witness*, 13 February 1847).

mankind 'from the Beneficent Giver of all'.⁵⁰ Miller typically appealed to the justice of God when condemning the laws of man. In this essay he utilises the biblical tales of Cain and Abel, Abram and Lot as the source for the origination of land ownership. In this, he applies the religious remit of *The Witness* to its broader social concerns.

The law of the land cannot create property: it can merely extend its sanction and protection to those previously existing rights of property upon which all legislation on the subject must rest, or be mere enacted violence and outrage, abhorrent to that ancient underived justice which existed ere man was, and which shall long survive every merely human law.⁵¹

In this essay, Miller applies his distinctively rhetorical use of the autobiographical voice. In so doing, he both animates the argument with personal interest but more importantly, he lends an empirical validation to his arguments so that they appear, not merely as the detached observations of an Edinburgh editor but the intimate experiences of a man who has lived and worked across the landscape of Scotland. The article is traced through with the private wanderings of Miller across his native landscape and his subsequent reflections upon the nature of ownership of that which he sees: the sky and the birds that fly within it, the stream and the sheep that cross the stream, leading him to conclude finally that the game of the country 'is not personal property: it is not real property: it belongs to an entirely different category: it is simply *imaginary* property'. Being such, the laws which regulate property are as mutable as the mind which conceives it and the law, in its nature mans' making, ought to reinvent the statutes anew.

⁵⁰ Hugh Miller, 'Is Game Property?' (*The Witness*, 3 February 1847).

⁵¹ Hugh Miller, 'Is Game Property?' (*The Witness*, 3 February 1847).

Religion and Public Morality

One essay in particular serves to illustrate some of the most striking features of Miller's editorial voice in its response to a society which he considered to be increasingly bereft of moral value. 'A Vision of the Railroad', written in 1843, is one of Miller's most impressive pieces of writing.⁵² Written in response to the proposed plans to allow train travel on Sundays, Miller warned against the increasingly secular spirit of the industrial age. The spread of the railways, as they tracked their way over Scotland, symbolised, to Miller, the sinister advance of industrialism upon the once undisturbed landscape, and the encroachment of worldly pursuit upon the sanctity of religious observance. The 'Vision' opens in the manner of fiction, with a direct epistolary address. 'I know not when this may reach you. We are much shut out from the world at this dead season of the year...' The letter (ostensibly addressed to Miller in Edinburgh) is from an inhabitant of Skye, a Gael named Allister who voices the concerns of an older, traditional and pious Scotland. Here, just as in his essay on 'The Franchise', Miller adopts an elaborate metaphor to convey a sense of imminent disaster. Once again it is winter, signifying a season of spiritual sterility. The sea is 'blackened by tempest, a solitary waste' and the island is 'fenced off from the land by an impassable line of breakers'. The imagery progresses from the warring elements to that of outright battle: 'We are in a state of siege.' The waves swell like the roar of distant artillery, communication is cut off on the western coast. With these images Miller foreshadows the coming of a distant apocalypse. The scene changes as Allister recalls an almost balladic 'tryst among the hills, not a half hour before sunset' with his brother Eachen. The thick mists and dank chill of this late meeting cast it in the appropriate mood of foreboding as the brothers discuss the moral and economic catastrophe anticipated by

⁵² Hugh Miller, 'A Vision of the Railroad' (*The Witness*, 4 March 1843).

the breaking of the Sabbath. Eachen recalls the warning of the parish Catechist who has advised him:

“Eachen, the thing lies so much in the ordinary course of Providence, that our blinded Sabbath-breakers, were [catastrophe] to happen, would recognise only disaster in it,- not judgement. I see at times, with a distinctiveness that my father would have called the second sight, that long weary line of rail, with its Sabbath travellers of pleasure and business speeding over it, and a crowd of wretched witnesses raised, all unwittingly and unwillingly on their own parts, to testify against it, and of coming judgement, at both its ends.”⁵³

The meeting is shrouded in religious and supernatural overtones, with Eachen warning Allister ‘the country’s *fey*’ (a Scots term for that which is marked for death or disaster). Upon parting, Allister falls asleep and Miller deploys the medievalist strategy of the dream vision. Once more nature displays a ‘leaden-coloured’ face and in the logic of the dream the distant shoreline transmutes into an endless line of steel railway track. ‘The entire landscape underwent a change’, the letter continues, and Miller shifts the scene to the modern metropolis of Edinburgh, its ‘viaducts [rising] an hundred feet overhead, till where the huge bulk seemed diminished to a slender thread on the far edge of the horizon’. Quite suddenly and somehow related to this modern industrial landscape, the reader is transported into a scene of future desolation:

It seemed as if years had passed – many years. I had an indistinct recollection of scenes of terror and suffering, - of the shouts of the maddened multitudes engaged in frightful warfare, - of the cries of famishing women and children, - of streets and lanes flooded with blood, - of raging flames enwrapping whole villages in terrible ruin, - of the flashing of arms, and the roaring of artillery, - but all was dimness and confusion. The recollection was that of a dream remembered in a dream.⁵⁴

The apocalypse is a religious one: ‘The solemn text was in my mind, - “Voices, and thunders, and lightnings, and a great earthquake, such as was not since men were on

⁵³ Hugh Miller, ‘A Vision of the Railroad’ (*The Witness*, 4 March 1843).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

earth, - so mighty an earthquake and so great”” (Revelation 16:18). Miller’s narrative describes a vision of the future cast in tragic destruction like the aftermath of the Great Flood. Time recedes once more so that the dreamer now views the wreckage of a collapsed train buried beneath the mosses and ivy of many years. The fractured engine is likened to a broken body with the wind rattling between its joints. Miller wishes to make the relation between material and human destruction palpably clear:

And here the rails had been torn up by violence, and there stretched across, breast high, a rudely piled rampart of stone. A human skeleton lay atop, whitened by the winds; there was a broken pike beside it; and stuck fast in the naked skull, which had rolled to the bottom of the rampart, the rusty fragment of a sword.⁵⁵

Miller appears to associate secularism with radicalism (the ‘skull seemed as if grinning at the sky from amid the tattered fragments of a cap of liberty’, and elsewhere, the dreamer sees the ‘soiled and tattered patches of the British scarlet’) implying that some sort of civil war has taken place, a war between tradition and progress, a revolutionary war for popular ascendancy, a war, perhaps even between man and God. There is a roofless and ruined parish church amid the carnage and the dreamer reads the ancient ‘memorial of the times of the Covenant’ from which he deciphers ‘merely a few half sentences, - “killing time”, - “faithful martyr”, - “bloody Prelates”’; and beneath them there was a fragmentary portion of the solemn text, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood?”” (Revelation 6:10). The dreamer finds the scattered remains of an altar, the fragment of a Catholic holy sign as if here paganism and the remains of false religion had devoured themselves too in a terrible war. ‘A huge cross of stone had been reared over the altar’, the essay continues, ‘but both the top and one of the arms had been struck away, and from the surviving arm there dangled a

⁵⁵ Ibid.

noose. The cross had been transformed into a gibbet.' In this horrific image, Miller conveys the awful destruction of religion in a terrible war of judgement.

The scene shifts once more to express a moment of grace as the speaker finds himself in an after-world where he hears the singing of the Psalms and in which he receives a warning which is also a kind of benediction. 'The period of trial wears fast away [...] the storms of our long winter are past, and we have survived them all; - patience, - a little more patience, - and we shall see the glorious spring time of the world begin! The vial is at length exhausted.' Amidst the horrible foreshadowing of carnal destruction, Miller invites a moment of hope, a belief in the eternal resurrection of the spirit in the grace of God, which alone can rescue man from his worldly sufferings. 'The ignorance and irreligion of the land have fully avenged themselves, and have been consumed, in turn, in fires of their own kindling', another psalmist explains, 'How could even mere men of the world have missed seeing the great moral evil that lay at the root of -.' His forestalled words invite the reader's own conclusion. As the dreamer begins to waken, the voice of the psalmists mingle with the casual gossip of two of Allister's neighbours reflecting upon the short-sighted catastrophe of the Sabbath railway. The vision is complete and the dreamer awakens. The letter closes thus:

My dream is, I am aware, quite unsuited for your columns, - and yet I send it to you. There are none of its pictured calamities that lie beyond the range of possibility, - nay, there are perhaps few of them that at this stage may not actually be feared; but if so, it is at least equally sure that there can be none of them that at this stage might not be averted.⁵⁶

'A Vision of the Railroad' is, undoubtedly, one of the most striking and disturbing of all Miller's writings. And yet it combines much that is characteristic of his style. The

⁵⁶ Ibid.

influence of the traditional folktale is present in the style of the opening and the 'Vision' is shot through with ominous supernatural portents and religious foreboding. In the depiction of the scene of judgement, Miller displays both his suspicion of the destructive results of revolution as well as his hostility to the 'false' religions of paganism, Catholicism, Puseyism and Episcopalianism, which he numbers amongst the victims of the apocalypse. But the central subject in the 'Vision' is Miller's warning against secular, industrial society with its desire merely for profit and pleasure. The result will be only loss, Miller appears to warn, not just financially as the country falls to its knees in moral ruin but ultimately, when the Sabbath-breakers will meet in the judgement of God. The essay gives a profound insight into Miller's thinking – even with the mastery of the detached neo-classical idiom that characterises his later writing there is still much of the morbid and startling imagination that marked the writing of the young amateur poet. But here the pre-occupation with death and suffering has evolved into a powerful religious sensibility marked by a fierce evangelism.

Scotland and Scottish Culture

National politics as they affected Scotland naturally dominate the pages of *The Witness*. Miller's attitude to Scotland's place within the British Union can, at best, be described as ambivalent. In his folkloric history of Scotland, *Scenes and Legends*, the Union of the Parliaments in 1707 is documented by the transcription of a fiercely patriotic manuscript, apparently written by a past schoolmaster of Cromarty, which angrily denounces the Scottish Kirk's support for the Union as a betrayal of national (and spiritual) interests.⁵⁷ There is no indication of nationalistic hostility towards England in

⁵⁷ This curious document is quoted at some length and forms the sum total of Miller's consideration of the event. 'I have seen a manuscript of 230 pages, written by this person [...] "May we not truly account," says he "for the deadness and carnality of the Church in this present time (1712), by the great hand many of its members had in carrying on the late Union [...] Woe unto thee, Scotland, for thou hast

his *First Impressions of England and It's People*, although the premise of the book is that Miller is visiting out-with his native country and distinctively Scottish features are compared with those of England. Moreover, in the opening chapter Miller stresses that British Union emphatically did not come about as a result of English martial victory.⁵⁸

A few articles written during the latter years of Miller's editorship of *The Witness* give a more direct impression of his feelings regarding the status of Scotland within Britain.

In 1853 the Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights was established and Miller's article approving its creation is explicit in his assessment of Scotland's cultural status:

As last Scotland is beginning to bestir herself; she has actually formed an association for the vindication of her national rights [...] At last, when almost all that was peculiarly Scottish has been trodden under foot [...] at last when the Church of the nation has been rent in twain [...] when the nobles, for the most part, have joined themselves to another creed [...] when Scotland dwells no longer in her "cottar toons" and her "farm hooses", and her "big has," but, driven by poverty and enticed by steam, has forsaken the old roofs that sheltered her earlier growth, and rushed madly into the cities [...] when the *big ha*, in nine cases out of ten is habited by a stranger and the last place to find the laird is at home [...] when the Highlands are a hunting field for him who has most [...] when we have gone near to loose the last remnant of judicial independence [...] when our voice is not heard in the Commons [...] when we are broken up into sections and parties and have scarcely a feeling that can be called *national*, much less a national existence, - when Scotland is no longer Scotland, but *north* Britain, the cold and callous north, only fit to be sneezed at by the southerner, - when all this is so, Scotland, meek and patient, has founded an association for the vindication of her rights.⁵⁹

sold thy birth right!' (*S&L*, 155-6). Given that Miller's *Scenes and Legends* was written in 1835, prior to his editorship of *The Witness*, it is reasonable to assume that the partisan tone of the letter and its criticism of English Erastianism, is not included for polemical reasons, and may therefore, in fact, be representative of Miller's own assessment of the event.

⁵⁸ 'It is quite enough for the English, as shown by the political history of modern times, that they conquered Ireland; had they conquered Scotland also, they would have been ruined utterly. "One such victory more and they would have been undone." Men have long suspected the trade of the hero to be a bad one; but it is only now that they are fairly beginning to learn, that of all the great losses and misfortunes, his master achievement - the taking of a nation - is the greatest and most incurably calamitous.' (*FI*, 4).

⁵⁹ Hugh Miller, 'Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights' (*The Witness*, 29 June, 1853).

These words reveal nostalgia for a distinctively feudal, agrarian Scotland and there is certainly some anachronism in Miller's rejection of Scottish urbanisation. Nevertheless, there is also an attack upon Scotland's subservient acceptance of political and judicial inequalities and of her meek accession to the national relegation to northern provinciality. Throughout 1853-1854 Miller supported the Scottish Association's petition for the reform of the Scottish Universities, which he considered were underfunded in comparison with English institutions. An untitled article in 1854 again upholds the National Association's statement against British centralisation. As in the article of the year previous, Miller imputes blame for much of Scotland's internal crises upon the indifference of 'imperial legislature':

Let us picture to ourselves two kingdoms, each with its separate monarch, its separate institutions and its different genius. [...] Let us suppose that between these two kingdoms a union is at least affected, - a union conceived and executed seemingly in a spirit of equality, - and that the lesser kingdom merges its Legislature into an Imperial Legislature. What will be the consequence? The conquest that could not be achieved by force of arms will be achieved by centralisation.⁶⁰

Miller continued his rhetorical address with the question as to whether the 'lesser country's authorities' will be 'represented in their integrity' and whether Scotland will be 'allowed to develop her own internal policy after her own manner, according to the genius of her people'? His answer is emphatic: 'Not at all. As a general rule, her interests will be neglected, because the country itself will assume no greater importance in the eyes of the Imperial Legislature than the relative number of influence of representatives in the Legislature itself. And as a particular rule, whenever the greater country chooses, it will play havoc with the institutions of the lesser.' By this logic, Miller proceeds: 'hence patronage, - hence disruptions, hence rejections of education

⁶⁰ Hugh Miller, untitled article on centralisation (*The Witness*, 3 June, 1854).

bills [...] hence universal anomaly, confusion and disorder in the lesser country,' It is clear from this article that Miller, somewhat tenuously, identifies Parliamentary indifference as the major cause of the Disruption of the Scottish Church, 'a result produced directly by the legislative indifference of those who had no interest in the matter, and no possible right to interfere, except through that system of centralisation which is invading us like a flood.' To Miller, the fact that Westminster would not uphold the Scottish General Assembly's right to abolish patronage resulted in the internal schisms between Moderate and Evangelical. Having no recourse to the law, the Evangelical Party, in Miller's analysis, was therefore forced, by political indifference, to enact its religious rights by walking out of the established Church. There is an intimation of regret regarding the Disruption here and perhaps also a desire to remove the blame from the Evangelical Party and attribute it instead to impersonal, political forces. Nevertheless, in these articles Miller articulates, if not a rejection of Union itself, then a denunciation of the neglect of Scottish institutional rights enshrined in that union. In his criticisms of the national legislature there is an implicit attack upon English cultural imperialism in the treatment of Scottish affairs.

Miller was equally outspoken in his defence of traditional Scottish culture particularly where he believed bad laws to have damaged the integrity of traditional communities and ways of living. While he embraced much of the progressive spirit of his age, Miller was naturally cautious and his 'conservatism of feeling' inclined towards the preservation of tradition in the language, folklore, dress and manners of the Scots people. In his essay on the Duke of Atholl's barring of Glen Tilt to public passage, Miller berated the 'cat-witted dukes and illiterate lords' who selfishly denied public access to their lands. He rebuked the legislative courts, which had recently banned public fishing in the Firth of Dornoch and Cromarty by defining them as rivers

and in his reply to the legal sophists invited the legislative court to choke on salt water.⁶¹

Miller was particularly vociferous in his defence of Highland culture. In a series of articles written between 1843 and 1856 *The Witness* was one of the first newspapers to speak out against the abuses of Highland landlords, the so-called 'clearances' (a term which Miller helped to popularise) and the national indifference to the deterioration of Highland culture.⁶² Krisztina Fenyo, in a paper presented to the bicentenary conference on the life and work of Hugh Miller in 2002, rejected the idea that Miller was the singular or the most radical voice of defence of the Highland cause and argued instead that Miller's involvement requires modification and contextualisation.⁶³ Yet in 1843, Miller's was the first voice in the British press to speak out against the 'improvement' policy in the Highlands in a series of articles entitled 'Sutherland As It Was And Is, Or How A Country May Be Ruined', a fact that, oddly, is not noted in Fenyo's own published study of the Highland Clearances.⁶⁴ The majority of criticism in the press did not arise until after 1845. Miller's *Cruise of the Betsey*, which appeared as a series of *Witness* essays in that year voiced a further indictment of the impact of the clearances upon Highland communities. Furthermore, Miller continued to write on the subject of

⁶¹ Hugh Miller, 'Glen Tilt Tabooed' (*The Witness*, 1 September 1847).

⁶² In his article 'Hugh Miller and Resistance to the Highland Clearances' in *Celebrating the Life and Times of Hugh Miller* (see Borley, above, pp. 48 – 63) Eric Richards (author of *A History of the Highland Clearances* (London: Croom Helm, 1985) and *The Highland Clearances: People, Landlords and Rural Turmoil* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2002) describes Miller's contribution to the debate on Highland policy as 'highly influential in moulding public opinion' writing that: 'Miller's angry denunciation was a substantial contribution to the literature of vilification which eventually undermined the Highland lairds and landlordism at large.' (p. 57) The article states that such a stance 'was not much sustained in the years after 1843 except by Miller himself'. (p.57).

⁶³ Krisztina Fenyo, 'Views of the Highlanders and the Clearances in the Scottish Press, 1845 – 1855: *The Witness* in Context' in *Celebrating the Life and Times of Hugh Miller*, (see Borley, above), pp. 321 – 327). Her paper is concerned to express the neglected significance of writers such as Robert Somers, Thomas Mulock, Donald McLeod and Donald Ross, outspoken critics who consistently attacked the abuses of the Highland Clearances.

⁶⁴ Krisztina Fenyo, *Contempt, Sympathy and Romance: Lowland Perceptions of the Highlands and the Clearances During the Famine Years 1845 – 1855* (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2000).

the Highlands throughout 1844 – 1847.⁶⁵ It is true, as Fenyo argues, that the *North British Daily Mail* under the editorship of Robert Somers in 1847 became the leading voice in articulating the Highland cause and that after 1852, (following the publication of the McNeill report), the cause was primarily taken up by the *Inverness Advertiser* and the *Northern Ensign*, papers which as Fenyo stresses, were ‘literally “dedicated to the Highlands” [and] provided a forum for all the most radical critics of the Highlands.’⁶⁶ But the fact that other newspapers devoted more coverage to the cause of the Highlands than *The Witness* in the years 1847 – 1855 does not undermine the fact that Miller was the first to raise the issue to public scrutiny in 1843 or that he continued to attack the policies adopted towards the Highlands and to defend Highland culture throughout his editorship of *The Witness*. Fenyo concludes her argument:

In the light of other sympathetic writers on the Highlands, I would argue that Hugh Miller’s role should be re-evaluated. In his stance over Highland issues Miller is usually described as ‘radical’, a ‘crusading’ editor, and a ‘scourge of landowners’. Indeed, his criticism of the Highland policies was strong, and his defence of the Highlanders impassioned. By the 1850s, however, *The Witness* lagged behind all the other radical and crusading papers, when it went almost completely silent during the times of worsening destitution and the most brutal clearances.⁶⁷

It is simply wrong to suggest that *The Witness* ‘went almost completely silent’ on the subject of the Highlands after 1850.⁶⁸ While Miller’s contribution certainly requires

⁶⁵ Hugh Miller, ‘A Highland Clearing’ (*The Witness*, 4 September 1844); ‘A Summer Ramble Among the Fossiliferous Deposits of the Hebrides’ (later published as *The Cruise of the Betsey*) (*The Witness*, 8 March – 16 August 1845); ‘Potato Failure – State of the Highlands’ (*The Witness*, 19 September, 1846); ‘“The Times” Commissioner’ [against The Times’ representation of Celtic racial inferiority] (*The Witness*, 21 October, 1846); ‘Destitution in the Highlands and Islands’ (*The Witness*, 25 November, 1846); ‘Past and Present Condition of the Highlands’ (*The Witness*, 12 December, 1846); ‘The Highland Destitution – The Provost’s Explanation’ (*The Witness*, 2 January, 1847); ‘Highland Destitution’ (*The Witness*, 20 January, 1847); ‘The Destitution’ (*The Witness*, 17 February, 1847).

⁶⁶ Krisztina Fenyo, ‘Views of the Highlanders and the Clearances in the Scottish Press, 1845 – 1855: *The Witness* in Context’, p.325.

⁶⁷ Krisztina Fenyo, ‘Views of the Highlanders and the Clearances in the Scottish Press, 1845 – 1855: *The Witness* in Context’, p. 324.

⁶⁸ Fenyo contends that 1849 ‘was the last time that *The Witness* devoted considerable space in its pages to the Highland crisis. After the autumn of 1849 the Highlands virtually disappeared from the pages of *The Witness*.’ (324) If four articles during 1849 can constitute ‘considerable space’, then surely it must

contextualisation and coverage of Highland issues in *The Witness* is relatively lesser than that of the *North British Daily Mail*, the *Inverness Advertiser* or the *Northern Ensign*, this does not undermine the fact that Miller's contribution, both in voicing one of the first attacks against Highland clearing and in sustaining that attack throughout his career, was a powerful, significant and persistent- if not the only - one.

One of the most significant and rhetorically persuasive of Miller's articles on the Highland Clearances was his seminal essay, 'Sutherland As It Was And Is'. Here Miller voiced a direct attack against the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland for the short-sightedness and inhumanity with which they had dealt with the Highland people who lived on their land until they were cleared to make way for the introduction of profitable sheep farming. The article is 'a minor masterpiece of sustained outrage'⁶⁹ and it signals the assurance with which Miller tackled the most controversial of subjects within the first years of his *Witness* editorship.

Miller attacks the Duke on two counts; the removal of the people from their native farming land and, secondly, his refusal to allow the Free Church to build churches on his land as a provision for the Presbyterian congregations of Sutherland. The argument avoids purely emotive rhetoric. Instead Miller proceeds from the authoritative writings of the Swiss political economist Simonde De Sismondi, who had dealt at length with the abuse of territorial wealth in relation to the Sutherland case in

be notable that Miller wrote a further three articles in 1850, another four in 1851, and continued to defend Highland culture from 1852 - 1856. ('The Barra Refugees' (*The Witness*, 18 December, 1850); 'The Expatriated Highlanders of Barra' (*The Witness*, 21 December, 1850); 'The Barra Refugees' (*The Witness*, 28 December, 1850); 'Highland Destitution' (*The Witness*, 15, 22 March, 26 July, 1851); 'The Highlands' (*The Witness*, 20 September, 1851); 'The Emigration Movement' (*The Witness*, 16 October, 1852); Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights' [attacks Westminster's indifference to Highland destitution] (*The Witness*, 29 June, 1853); 'A Luckless Experiment' [on the Highlands and Islands] (*The Witness*, 8 October, 1853); 'The Highlands' (*The Witness*, 29 September, 6 October, 1855); 'Macaulay on Scotland' [attacks Macauley's false representation of Highland culture] (*The Witness*, 6, 13, 27 February 1856). Also the articles appearing as 'My Schools and Schoolmasters, or, The Story of My Education' throughout 1853 articulated a spirited defence of Highland culture, as here: 'The grand difference between the circumstances of the people of the Highlands in the better time and the worse may be summed up in the one important vocable - *capital*.' (S&S, 278)).

⁶⁹ George Rosie, *Outrage and Order*, p. 119.

his *Etudes Sociales* series. The essay also reveals Miller's familiarity and agreement with the thinking of William Cobbett whose writing championed the values of rural life against the incursions of capitalism and commercial development. The distinctive feature of autobiographical narrative is intended to lend authority to Miller's analysis of Highland life: 'we are old enough to remember the country in its original state, when it was at once the happiest and one of the most exemplary districts in Scotland, and passed, at two several periods, a considerable time among its hills: we are not unacquainted with it now, nor with its melancholy and dejected people, that wear out life in their comfortless cottages on the sea-shore', and later: 'We spent a considerable time [...] among their thickly-clustered cottages on the eastern coast, and saw how they live, and how it happens that when years of comparative scarcity come on they starve.'⁷⁰

It was this intimate perspective and testimony of personal observation that so often gave the final persuasive force to Miller's conclusions when set against the scant experience of those writers of the capital who argued against him. In essays such as these, Miller's treatment never descends to the level of cold fact and analysis. Miller allows himself considerable poetic license in rendering with full pathos the pathetic situation of the Sutherland Highlanders. They are chiefly characterised by their qualities as courageous and intelligent soldiers, pious worshippers and hardworking and close-knit families. In fact, Miller's presentation of Highland culture was heavily informed by the enlightenment model of civilisation as a progression from a state of primitive savagery to that of enlightened social organisation. Rather than regarding the Highlanders as barbaric, as several commentators in the nineteenth century did, Miller instead tended to imbibe the romantic conception of the Highland rural idyll.

⁷⁰ Hugh Miller, 'Sutherland As It Is And Was,' (*The Witness* 16, 23, 26, 30 August and 6, 9 September 1843).

Sutherland is depicted as a country of 'snug farms' where the people exist in 'comfortable circumstances' and in a 'state of trustful security'. 'Never were there a happier a more contented people, or a people more strongly attached to the soil' he writes, 'nor one who does not look back on this period of comfort and enjoyment with sad and hopeless regret.'

Having established this elegiac and sympathetic portrait of the Sutherland people, Miller portrays the intrusions of Sutherland landowners as a kind of brutal Fall from grace. The article claims that some 15,000 people had been ejected and, borrowing from the authority of the accounts of Donald McLeod, Miller's account embellishes the vilification of Patrick Sellers as one of the main executors of the cruelties. In describing the effects of the clearances, Miller's language is stark. The country having been converted into sheep pasture, the people are 'compressed into a wretched selvage of poverty and suffering [on the] fringes of the country.' The emphasis upon the resultant hardship is achieved by a continual repetition of key phrases. Nor is the article shy of attributing direct blame for these atrocities. One passage in particular, illustrates Miller's ability in assailing his subject with the most violent and startling metaphors:

Even the vast wealth and great liberality of the Stafford family militated against this hapless country: it enabled them to treat it as the mere subject of an interesting experiment, in which gain to themselves was really no object, - nearly as little so as if they had resolved on dissecting a dog alive for the benefit of science. It was a still further disadvantage, that they had to carry on their experiment by the hands, and to watch its first effect with the eyes, of others. The agonies of the dog might have had their softening influence on a dissector who held the knife himself; but there could be no such influence exerted over him, did he merely issue orders to his footmen that the dissection should be completed, remaining himself, meanwhile, out of sight and out of hearing.⁷¹

Miller's point in this case is to illustrate that the debased condition, so long ascribed to the Highlanders, was in fact the result of the criminal neglect of the selfish and ignorant

⁷¹ Hugh Miller, 'Sutherland As It Is And Was' (*The Witness* 16, 23, 26, 30 August and 6, 9 September 1843).

landowner. Once more alluding to the terrible abuses so often sanctioned by law, Miller declares that 'it is a defect of the British Constitution strongly exemplified by the case of Sutherland, that the rights of property may be so stretched as to overbear the rights of conscience'. Later, he conceives of the damage inflicted upon Sutherland as an ulcerous sore, but one 'carefully bandaged up from the public eye'. Moreover, the fact that such a wound could be inflicted upon the body of Highland culture was due, Miller argued, to racial discrimination. The experiment had been feasible because the people affected '*were mere Celts*' (italics in original) replaced by the farmers of the 'industrious Lowland race.'

The article is also informed by a peculiarly Evangelical polemic. According to Miller some ninety percent of Sutherland Highlanders had joined the Free Church following the Disruption in May. The Duke of Sutherland's refusal to grant Free Church sites completed the ruin of an already dispossessed people. In Miller's dramatic phrase: 'it ground into powder what had previously been broken into fragments – to degrade the poor inhabitants to a still lower level than that in which they had been so cruelly precipitated.'

The article, perhaps borrowing from the imagery of the primitive state of nature evoked in the opening, argues that the incursions of the landowners in Sutherland were met with only a stoic self-restraint. Miller may have been unaware of the extent of active and occasionally violent resistance by the native Highlanders. It is more likely, however, that Miller's depiction of a peaceable submission to authority was intended to protect the Highland cause from association with incendiary political radicalism. Miller's rejection of the abuses of the elite typically did not incite violent reaction. Instead Miller's faith was in the power of the pen and in the force of public awareness. It was his belief that the 'general mart of public opinion' would eventually

‘shake the foundations of the hitherto despotic power’. It was as a transmitter of the obscured truth that Miller conceived his own role in his *Witness* writings on the Highlands: ‘The press and the platform must be employed. The frank and generous English must be told’. In invoking his own intimacy with Highland culture, once again Miller acted as a voice from within the people, speaking out upon their neglected behalf.

The International Scene

Finally, Miller’s *Witness* essays could be just as engaged in international as domestic affairs. His articles on the Crimean war in 1856 and on the conclusion of the war in Afghanistan show that he was equally capable of criticising British foreign policy.⁷² He described the war in Afghanistan as ‘by far the most disastrous passage which occurs in the military history of Great Britain’ and as ‘a terrible passage in the history of our country – terrible in all its circumstances. Some of its earlier scenes are too revolting for the imagination to call up.’⁷³ For the purposes of his popular audience, which in all probability had scant knowledge of the motives and outcomes of the Afghan war, Miller avoids political analysis and instead, with his considerable descriptive powers, paints a vivid scene of destruction. His style here is strikingly reminiscent of Carlyle in

The French Revolution (1837):

A wild scene of rocks and mountains darkened overhead with tempest, beneath covered deep with snow: a broken and dispirited force, struggling hopelessly through the scarce passable defiles, - here thinned by the headlong assaults of howling fanatics, insensible to fear, incapable of remorse and thirsting for blood,

⁷² The Crimean war of 1854-55 resulted from the determination of the British and European empire to prevent Russia from taking over the disintegrating Ottoman Empire. After a protracted battle, Britain ultimately secured its interests in the Crimea, but at the cost of massive loss of lives in the British forces. Similarly, the Russian empire was perceived as a threat to the British imperial interests particularly in Afghanistan where the so-called North West Frontier separated Russia from the European colonial empire in India. Eventually Britain secured control of the area through a brutal invasion of Afghanistan, which met with fierce resistance from the Pathan tribes.

⁷³ Hugh Miller, ‘Conclusion of the War in Affghanistan’ [sic] (*The Witness*, 3 December, 1842).

- there decoyed to destruction through the promises of cruel and treacherous thieves, devoid alike of the sense of honour and the feeling of pity; with no capacity or conduct amongst its leaders; full of the frightful recollections of past massacres, hopeless of ultimate escape; struggling, however, instinctively on amid the unceasing ring of musketry from thicket and crag, exhibiting mile after mile a body less dense and extended, leaving behind it a long unbroken trail of its dead; at length wholly wasting away, like the upward heave of a wave on a sandy beach, and but one solitary horseman, wounded and faint with loss of blood, holding on his perilous course, to tell the fate of all the others.⁷⁴

In this single sentence, Miller's brief and heaped clauses spit out the narrative with the immediacy of the telegram wired from the war scene. Image piles upon image to create a fractured and grotesque portrait. Miller had some skill in capturing the spirit of the war-field, having gathered the details of his uncle Sandy's military experiences. The narrative is breathless, as if with a sense of immediate anticipation and at the same time feels almost endless, as if the multiple impressions of war will never cease. And yet, with some inevitability it capitulates in pathos, as relatives at home receive the news, 'Killed in the Khyber Pass'. In this essay, Miller is not so much concerned with attributing specific blame or in analysing possible outcomes. This is an essay which strikes at the futility of an immoral war. Able to rise above the shallow patriotism espoused by so many Victorian commentators in their exploits abroad, Miller does not, however, eschew the prejudices of his times in regarding the Pathan tribes of Afghanistan as unfeeling savages. From Miller's moral standpoint, the Afghani Pathans were nothing less than primitives, unthinking and unreasoning. However misinformed this is from a contemporary perspective, the fact remains that Miller was arguing against imperial abuse. The Afghan war demonstrated, in his view, the injustice of wealth and civilisation forcing its might upon a poor and primitive people.

The Afghan war, regarded as a war of principle, was eminently unjust; regarded as a war of expediency, it was eminently imprudent. It seems to have originated

⁷⁴ Hugh Miller, 'Conclusion of the War in Affghanistan' (*The Witness*, 3 December, 1842).

with men of narrow and defective genius, not overly largely gifted with the moral sense [...] War is an evil in all circumstances. It is a great evil, even when just; it is a great evil even when carried on against a people who know and respect the laws of nations. But it is peculiarly a great evil when palpably not a just war, and when carried on against a barbarous people.⁷⁵

Writing such as this demonstrates the evocative power of Miller's prose and his willingness to nail his final conclusions, with gusto, to the wall.

In a way that is remarkably prophetic of the nature of modern warfare, Miller also penned a description of the Crimean war, chiefly remarkable for two things. Firstly, Miller perceived that the war in the Crimea represented 'a war of the world's pre-eminently mechanical people in the world's pre-eminently mechanical age'⁷⁶ and he noted that material self-interest had undermined the *camaraderie* necessary for war-time leadership reflecting that the 'sub-division of labour which has so mightily improved the mechanical standing of Britain in the aggregate, [has] restricted and lowered the general ability of the individual'. Once again, Miller's political commentary and rhetorical style is reminiscent of the strident anti-materialism of Carlyle in essays such as his 1829 'Signs of the Times'. Secondly, Miller remarks upon the ubiquitous press interest so that 'the whole civilised world became the interested witnesses of what was going on. The war became a great game at chess, with a critical public looking over the shoulders of the players.' To this he adds the prophetic reflection that in no such former war did the public ever become as skilful in soapbox criticism.

Miller's journalistic scope was never myopic. In countless other articles and in several subjects he considered the affairs of foreign nations and races. He spoke consistently against slave labour in the colonies and commented upon all Britain's major ventures abroad. Having no independent foreign correspondent, however, *The*

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Hugh Miller, 'Characteristics of the Crimean War' (*The Witness*, 14 June 1856).

Witness was reliant upon second-hand reports for its assessment of international politics. For this reason, Miller is never as penetrative in his analysis of foreign affairs as in his domestic commentary. However, the breadth of his view, even in his occasionally naive rendering (ameliorated by his skill in capturing landscapes on a vast canvas) is amply demonstrated in this passage from the leading article of the New Year of 1845:

The past year has witnessed many curious changes, as a dweller in time; the coming year has already looked down on many a curious scene, as a journeyer [sic] over space. It has seen Cochin-China, with all its unmapped islands, and the ancient empire of Japan, with its cities and provinces unknown to Europe. It has heard the roar of a busy population amid the thousand streets of Peking, and the wild dash of the midnight tides as they fret the rocks of the Indian Archipelago. It has been already with our friends in Hindustan; it has been greeted, we doubt not, with the voice of prayer, as the slow iron hand of the city clock indicated its arrival to the missionaries at Madras [...] It has travelled over the land of pagodas, and is now entering on the land of mosques. Anon, it will see the moon in her wane, casting the dark shadows of columned Palmyra over the sands of the desert; and the dim walls of Jerusalem looking out on a silent and solitary land [...] And then, after marking the red glare of Etna reflected in the waves that slumber around the moles of Syracuse, - after glancing on the towers of the Seven-hilled City, and the hoary snows of the Alps, - after speeding over France, over Flanders, over the waves of the German sea, it will be with ourselves, and the tall ghostly tenements of Dun-Edin will re-echo the shouts of the High Street.⁷⁷

This is Hugh Miller's writing at its best: evocative, assured, eclectic in its vision but rich in detail and observation.

The authority conferred upon Hugh Miller by the status of *The Witness* assuaged, in large part, the literary insecurity manifest in his earlier writing. If Miller betrayed a degree of regret in taking up the role of the newspaper editor, having once aspired to greater literary posterity, then he recognised at the same time that this might provide the opportunity from which, at last, to issue his distinctive voice. In his role as a

⁷⁷ Hugh Miller, 'The New Year' (*The Witness*, 1 January 1845).

polemical journalist Miller could declaim with confidence upon the issues that he regarded as most important and, indeed, his *Witness* writing gains from its clarity of focus and certainty of attack. The best of his writing evinces a humour and wit that possess a rhetorical assurance and masterly control of rhythm and tone. It is true that Miller was often guilty of veering into a bellicose and often personal attack when in the fray of religious, partisan dispute. In this, he made enemies of several public figures. Yet if Miller could be drawn into angry denunciation against the authoritative figures of his attack, his relationship to his reading audience was always one of sympathy and inclusiveness. The autobiographical emphasis that was so characteristic of all of Miller's early writing was to remain.⁷⁸ In forging the literary role of 'man of the people' speaking on behalf of the people, Miller's intimate address forged an important ideological identification between himself and his audience. It was as a voice of the people risen to the authority of the man of letters that Miller wished to issue his appeal to the causes of political and social equality as well as of moral and spiritual integrity.

It is ironic then, that in issuing arguably one of the most successful and appealing voices of the Free Church, it was Miller's very distinction as an independent, liberal and diverse writer that saw him clash with the leadership of his own religious party. Miller guided *The Witness* newspaper to commercial success on terms very much of his own making. Even Thomas Chalmers became impatient at times with Miller's idiosyncratic approach, reputedly complaining of his article on the railroads in 1843, 'Writing 'A Vision of the Railroad' when we want money!'⁷⁹ Miller's refusal to adhere to a strictly doctrinal agenda in *The Witness* provoked Candlish's proposal for Miller's demotion in 1847. Miller was initially outraged, later disconsolate. From 1847 onwards

⁷⁸ Michael Shortland, in his article 'Miller's Contribution to The Witness 1840 – 1856' (see Shortland, above) has also noted this: 'Other pieces of Miller's first-rate political and social reporting were written after the fact and are to some degree autobiographical' (p. 295).

⁷⁹ Thomas Chalmers, quoted in Bayne, II, 224.

he was increasingly to turn away from ecclesiastic affairs and to begin concentrating singularly upon his social thesis and, in particular, its relationship to his flourishing engagement with science.

Chapter Eight:

Echoing the Footprints of God: Science Writing

Didactic Aims

Increasingly isolated from the Free Church after 1847 Miller turned to secular subjects,¹ including the geological projects for which he was quickly gaining a widespread reputation. Miller's first scientific prose on the old red sandstone of the North of Scotland appeared in *The Witness* in seven essays between September and October of 1840 in the first year of his editorship. They were so popular that Miller later fleshed them out to produce his first geological publication in 1841, *The Old Red Sandstone or New Walks in an Old Field*. It was to become known as a 'classic of mid-Victorian popular science'², running to some twenty-six editions. *The Old Red Sandstone* received instant scientific acclaim, not just for the ichthyological discoveries Miller had made in the tertiary formations of the Devonian system (as early as 1840, the distinguished Swiss naturalist Louis Agassiz had conferred upon Miller the honour of naming one of Miller's most interesting and significant fossil findings *Pterichthys milleri* – 'Miller's winged fish') but for the book's lucid descriptive style and accessibility. The English geologist William Buckland proclaimed that he had never been so much astonished in his life by the powers of any

¹ Describing the impact of Miller's dispute with Candlish, Bayne writes of Miller: 'He imbibed an invincible repugnance to handling the Free Church questions of the day. Resolute to speak no man's mind save his own, and shrinking from the bitter necessity which he knew to be entailed upon the frank utterance of his own sentiments, he became shy of Church matters altogether, made it his aim to afford scope, in the columns of the paper, for an expression of opinion, in speech and letter, by rival parties, rather than to influence either in leading articles, and sought for himself a more congenial sphere in science and literature' (Bayne II, 296). I discuss Miller's 1847 confrontation with Robert Candlish at greater length in Chapter 11. For evidence of Miller's movement away from ecclesiastic subjects after 1847, see Appendix F. As well as a marked decrease in numbers of articles dealing with ecclesiastic subjects after 1847, as indicated in the Appendix, the fact that Miller was less engaged in ecclesiastic politics after this date is also indicated by the absence of reference to Miller's Church career in his 1854 autobiography, *My Schools and Schoolmasters*.

² George Rosie, *Outrage and Order*, p.69.

man as he had been by the geological descriptions of 'Mr Miller' and added that he 'would give [his] left hand to possess such powers of description as this man'.³ Miller also received favourable reviews in the *Westminster Review*, the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Journal of American Science*, and from Roderick Murchison, to whom the book was dedicated.⁴

If Miller's Creationist interpretation of geologic time was to be latterly discredited by Darwinism in the late nineteenth century, critical recognition of Miller's prose style in communicating the new language of science nevertheless persists. John Hedley Brooke takes this view in his assessment of Miller's contribution to nineteenth-century science:

Miller's assumption that there had been creative acts of God at the beginning of each sharply differentiated epoch would prove difficult to sustain in the wake of the Darwinian hypothesis [...] A negative appraisal may, however, conceal something. As a *popularizer* of geology, Miller was surely without equal.⁵

His works, as James Secord has noted, sold like fashionable novels.⁶ One modern critic describes the *Old Red Sandstone* as 'an explosion of natural history discourse and one of the nineteenth century's truly big books about time and life.'⁷

Miller was not alone in his intention to make the findings of science accessible to the amateur enthusiast. He belongs to a tradition of scientific popularisers

³ William Buckland quoted in George Rosie, *Outrage and Order*, p. 70.

⁴ Sir Roderick Impey Murchison (1792 - 1871), a Scottish geologist and geographer, was responsible for the establishment of the Silurian geological system, and alongside Adam Sedgwick, the Devonian System. In 1855 he was appointed Director-General of the Geological Survey, the most important official post in British geology. Murchison wrote a favourable report to the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1841, acknowledging Miller's 'unaided' contributions to palaeontological research.

⁵ John Hedley Brooke, 'Like Minds: The Gods of Hugh Miller' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above), pp. 171-187 (p. 173).

⁶ James Secord, *Controversy in Victorian Geology: the Cambrian-Silurian Dispute* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 14.

⁷ James G. Paradis, 'The Natural Historian as Antiquary of the World' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above), pp. 122-151 (p. 135).

represented among the Victorians by writers such as John Tyndall, T.H. Huxley, Richard Proctor and John George Wood. These writers sought to elucidate scientific questions in such a way that readers were struck, not by the remoteness, but by the urgent closeness to the political, economic and philosophical issues particular to the times. Miller conceived the intellectual project of scientific discovery as of particular relevance to popular self-education. In the opening chapter Miller actually offered *The Old Red Sandstone* as an 'exemplary essay' to working men, advising them:

Do not seek happiness in what is misnamed pleasure; seek it rather in what is termed study. Keep your consciences clear, your curiosity fresh, and embrace every opportunity of cultivating your minds. You will gain nothing by attending Chartist meetings. The fellows who speak nonsense with fluency at these assemblies, and deem their nonsense eloquence, are totally unable to help either you or themselves; or, if they do, they succeed in helping themselves, it will be all at your expense. Leave them to harangue unheeded, and set yourselves to occupy your leisure hours in making yourselves wiser men. (*ORS*, 33)

From his assumed role as the working man's exemplar, Miller utilises his scientific successes in an attempt to inspire working men to educate themselves in a similar way. Having begun with a direct appeal to his specific working audience, Miller continues his account in the autobiographical mode characteristic of his inclusive style of address: 'It was twenty years last February since I set out, a little before sunrise, to make my first acquaintance with a life of labour and restraint ...' (*ORS*, 35). Once again we note the autobiographical and self-reflexive style typical of Miller's scientific prose writing. Miller utilises the autobiographical narrative within his scientific expositions to forge identification between his own experience and that of the working audience to whom he speaks. In this way, he made his didactic message more palatable: as the advice of one working man to another, rather than the kind of condescending moralising typical of the Victorian middle classes in their addresses to working men. The effect of the autobiographical mode, moreover, is to

make the narrative more immediately engaging. In appealing largely to a popular audience, Miller sought to avoid the kind of prosaic, specialised textbook style typical of the scientific treatise, and to stress the personal engagement of geologic fieldwork and its ennobling effects upon the sensibilities. In the following passage, from the first chapter of *The Old Red Sandstone*, Miller depicts his geologic pursuits as a period of relief and sustaining inspiration, away from the drudgery of common labour.

In the course of the first day's employment I picked up a nodular mass of blue limestone, and laid it open by a stroke of the hammer. Wonderful to relate, it contained inside a beautifully finished piece of sculpture, - one of the volutes, apparently of an Ionic capital; and not the far-famed walnut of the fairy tale, had I broken the shell and found the little dog lying within, could have surprised me more. Was there another such curiosity in the whole world? [...] Of all Nature's riddles, these seemed to me to be at once the most interesting and the most difficult to expound. I treasured them carefully up, and was told by one of the workmen to whom I showed them, that there was a part of the shore about two miles farther to the west where curiously-shaped stones, somewhat like the heads of boarding pikes, were occasionally picked up; and that in his father's days the country people called them thunderbolts, and deemed them of sovereign efficiency in curing bewitched cattle. Our employer, on quitting the quarry for the building on which we were to be engaged, gave all the workmen a half-holiday. I employed it in visiting the place where the thunderbolts had fallen so thickly, and found it a richer scene of wonder than I could have fancied it even in my dreams (*ORS*, 40-1).

Miller's enthusiasm is infectious - and it is intended to be. His object was to inspire in working men a curiosity for study, elsewhere in literature and history, here, in the natural sciences. And if science had hitherto been communicated as an exclusive arena, then Miller's further intention was to demonstrate its accessibility. One of Miller's most distinctive contributions to nineteenth-century scientific prose was his ability to transform the blank faces of stone into scenes of genuine wonder and awe ('I passed on from ledge to ledge, like the traveller of the tale through the city of statues, and at length found one of the supposed aerolites I had come in quest of firmly imbedded in a mass of shale' (*ORS*, 42)) and to suggest the more profound resonances of geologic discovery.

Miller and the Social Philosophy of Victorian Science

In his address to working men, Miller was not solely concerned with the enlightening function of scientific endeavour, however. He viewed science itself as an arena of crucial social-philosophic debate with profound spiritual implications. In *Footprints of the Creator* (1849), Miller's reply to Robert Chambers's anonymous publication of *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) Miller explicitly argued against Humean scepticism in connection with a general theory of natural science, and warned of its potential moral ramifications. In arguing against the prevailing 'development hypothesis', Miller sought to undermine atheism's refuge in the Humean argument against miracles. To allow Hume's argument to stand would, for Miller, be to deny the very active principle by which he understood creation to be formed: the divine intervention of the Creator. 'Neither Hume nor La Place ever attempted to show that miracles could not take place', he argues, 'they merely directed their argument against a belief in them [...] No *demonstration* of the non-existence of a Great First Cause has been ever yet attempted, nor, until the knowledge of some great sceptic extends over all space, *can* ever be rationally attempted.' (FC, 239) And in a later chapter he concludes:

The infidel who, in this late age of the world, would attempt falling back on the fiction of an 'infinite series,' would be laughed to scorn. They all began to be. But how? No true geologist holds by the development hypothesis;- it has been resigned to sciolists [sic] and smatterers; - and there is but one other alternative. They began to be, *through the miracle of creation*. From the evidence furnished by these rocks we are shut down either to the belief in miracle, or to the belief of something else infinitely harder of reception, and as thoroughly unsupported by testimony as it is contrary to experience. Hume is at length answered by the severe truths of stony science. He was not, according to Job, 'in league with the stones of the field' and they have risen in irresistible warfare against him in the Creator's behalf. (FC, 267)

Rhetorically persuasive as Miller's writing is, it has little else to pit against Hume's scepticism than the argument that without the adherence to Biblical authority we

remain seeking alternatives potentially less credible than the Genesis account. What alarmed Miller about the development hypothesis was its promotion of a model of selfishness within nature which Miller feared would, in the wrong hands, compound the principle of self-interest in human affairs. He believed that the scientific errors of the development thesis involved profound moral consequences:

There is a species of superstition which inclines men to take on trust whatever assumes the name of science [...] And owing mainly to the wide diffusion of this credulous spirit of the modern type [...] the development doctrines are doing much harm on both sides of the Atlantic, especially among intelligent mechanics, and a class of young men engaged in the subordinate departments of trade and the law. For it invariably happens, that when persons in these walks become materialists, they become also turbulent subjects and bad men. That belief in the existence after death, which forms the distinguishing instinct of humanity, is too essential a part of man's moral constitution not to be missed when away; and so, when once fairly eradicated, the life and conduct rarely fail to betray its absence. (*FC*, 'To The Reader' lxvi-lxvii)

Miller slyly turns the argument against religious superstition on its head, warning against the unthinking acceptance of modern scientific theory. Notably, he is particularly concerned about the moral effect of sceptical science upon 'the intelligent working man' - with whom he is most intimately concerned - believing, as he does, that religion guards against personal and social degradation.

Within the circles of nineteenth-century science there were those who did hold to the religious principles of the time. Robert Chambers did not deny the existence of God in his *Vestiges of Creation*.⁸ As John Henry has argued, Miller can be seen as belonging to the nineteenth-century 'voluntarist' school of religious thought that adhered to Calvin's teachings upon the omniscience of God. In contrast, there arose during that period, and in response to Enlightenment ideas, an 'intellectualist theory'

⁸ James Secord has recently argued, however, that Chambers simply tacked on the religious elements of *Vestiges* in order to placate contemporary religious sentiments. ('Behind the Veil: Robert Chambers and *Vestiges*' in *History, Humanity and Evolution: Essays for John C. Greene*, ed. by James R. Moore, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) pp. 165-94 (p.171)).

of religion which drew on John Locke's ideas about a supremely rational Creator. Henry sums up the opposition thus: 'the difference between intellectualist and voluntarist theologians on this issue is best summed up with the old chestnut: the intellectualist believes that God wills something because it is good: the voluntarist believes that something is good because God wills it.'⁹ These ideas arose mainly in response to the vexed question of evil within a divinely ordered universe. For the intellectualists, the ultimate wisdom of God ensured that no aspect of God's universe could be considered out of keeping with his ultimate plan and that therefore all circumstances, no matter how apparently terrible, had a pre-ordained justice. Such a view was concurrent with Locke's theories of self-interest harnessed by social contract, which reasoned that man's anti-social impulses are held in check by the rationale that one's own ends are best achieved by appealing to the co-operative self-interest of others. In the same way, reprobate elements within human nature were assumed to be pre-ordained as part of an ultimate logic that public benefit is best served by private self-interest.¹⁰ Almost inevitably, this theological vision of static perfection led to a kind of 'Cosmic Toryism' in which all aspects of society were condoned on the basis that God had ordained them to remain in that way. If the intellectualists interrogated God's justice by an appeal to his ultimate rationality, Miller's voluntarist position was less assertive in questions of divine accountability, holding to the sentiments expressed by one of Miller's favourite poets, William Cowper, that 'God moves in mysterious ways | His wonders to perform'. It was not for man to question why God made the world as he did. Man's mind could not

⁹ John Henry, 'Palaeontology and Theodicy: Religion, Politics and the *Asterolepis* of Stromness' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above), pp. 151-171(p. 154).

¹⁰ Similarly, Adam Smith's capitalist advocacy of economic competition was a corollary to 'social Darwinism', the belief in a commercial 'survival of the fittest'.

possibly fathom the depths of God's wisdom and it would be arrogant to presume to do so. Thus, in *Footprints of the Creator*, Miller could write:

The reasoning, calculating brain was moulded by the creative finger, and man became a living soul. Such seems to be the true reading of the wondrous inscription chiselled deep in the rocks. It furnished us with no clue by which to unravel the unapproachable mysteries of creation, - these mysteries belong to the wondrous Creator, and to Him only. We attempt to theorize upon them, and to reduce them to law, and all nature rises up against us in our presumptuous rebellion. (*FC*, 277-8)

However, the voluntarist position allowed for a much more radical approach to social questions. If intellectualist theodicy was used to justify *laissez-faire* politics, then Miller's creed was much more aggressive in its attack on the faults of society itself. A common implication of the intellectualist model is that the individual is responsible for his own self-improvement, and subsequently many regarded the poor and indigent as having only themselves to blame for their suffering within the divine reason of the Godly universe. Miller, on the other hand, believed that suffering was the fault, not of the (sinful) individual, but of society, and blamed poor social conditions upon poorly made laws. As John Henry writes:

Miller's refusal to accept suggestions that the poor were poor, or remained so, primarily as a result of their own moral failings, is in keeping with his voluntaristic refusal to accept that God has created the best of all possible worlds in which poverty is part of the immutable system. Those who do think this way believe that the poor are poor essentially because they are morally and intellectually inferior to those in the higher classes and have been created that way by [...] God.¹¹

Miller could never have accepted that position. His inscrutable and omnipotent God may be shrouded in the authoritarian aspect associated by modern readers with dogmatic Calvinism, but it allowed Miller a more radical social position by which to challenge the self-justifying theology of the capitalistic middle and upper classes and

¹¹ John Henry, 'Palaeontology and Theodicy: Religion, Politics and the *Asterolepis* of Stromness' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science* (see Shortland, above), p. 165-6.

their creed of *laissez-faire* politics. In this way, Hugh Miller's scientific writing is in no way abstract or purely theoretical. It is intimately related to his conception of moral and social integrity. For Miller, science was not only a means of self-cultivation, but was an expression of God's existence, guarding against the moral dangers of scepticism and justifying his call for social improvement and reform.

Generic Equivocation in the Scientific Project

The distinctive narrative style of *The Old Red Sandstone*, which won him so many admirers, was to be characteristic of all Miller's scientific prose. By 1841, he had gained an authority both from the recognition of his geological findings as well as the popularity of his written style. Miller possessed a knowledge shared by only an elite few in the opening years of the nineteenth century and by the mid-1840s he was corresponding and working with some of the leading geologists and naturalists of the day. As Gillian Beer recognises in her study of science and nineteenth-century culture, *Open Fields* (1996), interpretation is the key to power and the scientists of the nineteenth century had begun to claim the authority of the first person plural, 'we,' in their written discourse¹² - a feature which Miller adopted in his early writings on the old red sandstone in 1840 and which was to become characteristic of his authoritative editorial style. This collective pronoun usage, as Beer points out, expresses not only a necessary subjectivity but also authorial centrality. Just as Miller had adopted the necessary rhetorical techniques to assert his credibility as a man of letters, so too his scientific discourse seeks to express to his audience his own authority as a man of science. To a certain extent, Miller's autobiographical narrative assured his centrality within the text. He is constantly invoking the argument of empirical knowledge to defend his conclusions. Furthermore, he rallied several weighty scientific names to his

cause including Murchison, Agassiz and Richard Owen, and, calling also on a different kind of authority, he regularly cited the literary works of Homer, Milton, Pope, Addison and Cowper. The practice of making classical allusions in scientific discourse thus claimed community with a selected brand of readers, signalling Miller's affiliation to the learned and scholarly.¹³ As Claude Bernard wrote in 1865, 'l'art; c'est moi, la science, c'est nous.'¹⁴ If Miller's earlier writing had been an attempt to define *himself* in relation to the literary world by asserting his distinctive cultural and class values, then his scientific works express his desire to communicate his universal vision in the relationship between God and man, and man with man.

It is as a result of both Miller's didactic purpose as well as this comprehensive vision that Miller's scientific prose is often so eclectic in its concerns. Miller's later scientific writing published from *The Witness* as: *The Cruise of the Betsey or A Summer Holiday in the Hebrides* (1845), *First Impressions of England and Its People* (1847) and *Rambles of a Geologist or Ten Thousand Miles over the Fossiliferous Deposits of Scotland* (1848), resist specific generic categorisation. As well as his scientific observations, Miller reflects upon literature, folklore, local and national issues, Free Church politics and his theological interpretations of geology.¹⁵ Diverse

¹² Gillian Beer, *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 158.

¹³ This is not to deny Miller's appeal to the working man. The practice of making classical reference was a common technique in Victorian science that served several functions: some social, some illustrative, some argumentative. Moreover, Miller is unique amongst his scientific peers for including the wisdom of the working man in opposition to the sophistry of the intellectual theorist, in defence of the 'plain sense' of his argument. In Chapter 11 of *Footprints of the Creator*, Miller frames a discussion between 'a plain, observant' farmer and a philosopher of the school of Lamark, with the former making the eloquent remarks upon the development thesis. "Master," replies the farmer, "I see you are a scholar and, I suspect, a wag. It would take a great deal of believing to believe all that [...] it is *clean against experience*, as my poor old neighbour the weaver used to say, - against *my* experience, Master [...] and so I cannot believe it; but I do and must believe instead, - for it is not contrary to experience, and much according to testimony, - that the Author of all created both land-productions and sea-productions at the 'times before appointed,' and 'determined the bounds of their habitation'; 'By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God;' and I find I can be a believer on God's terms at much less expense of credulity than an infidel on yours.'" (FC, 204-5)

¹⁴ Claude Bernard, quoted in Gillian Beer, *Open Fields*, p. 39.

¹⁵ As a specimen of Miller's integrative and eclectic approach we need look no further than the contents description of *The Cruise of the Betsey* (Appendix E).

as his interests may appear, the more secular concerns of Miller's scientific writing often possess a significant bearing on his scientific outlook. James G. Paradis, for example, has explored the connection between Miller's conception of natural history and his Romantic antiquarianism. Burke's essay on the *Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) depicted 'vastness' as the most powerful source of the sublime and, as Paradis has noted, Miller, in his work, makes several references to immense structures and time periods, using the aesthetical diction of the sublime found in Burke and Addison. An analysis of Miller's use of metaphor reveals the extended metaphorical conception of 'earth as monument' in his writing. Like Carlyle's vivid conception of the historical text,¹⁶ Miller repeatedly alludes to the inscription of geologic signs, each stratum of the earth bearing a new page in the history of the world's making. In recording the remote histories of a cryptic and forgotten past hidden within the rocks, Miller blends the notions of ancient fact and ancient myth, allowing him to cross over into the romantic antiquarian territory of ancient and forgotten lore. In *The Cruise of the Betsey*, for example, Miller describes the tale of the famous cave of Frances (*Uamh Fhraing*) where the McLeods of a neighbouring island smoked the entire population of Eigg to death. In picking through the charred remains of the scene one is reminded of his role as a geologist tracing back the evidences of Time from the fossil remains near the earth's surface. In this way Miller's unearthing of the folklore and history of Highland culture mirrors his discovery of the fossil deposits of the region and the history of the earth and the history of man ('scattered in my mind like the fragments of a broken fossil' (*CB*, 42)) blend seamlessly into the folkloric narrative in which Miller delighted to tell:

¹⁶ Carlyle's writing repeatedly invokes the persona of the 'DRYASDUST' historian of facts and figures. Rather than a one-dimensional chronology, Carlyle regarded history as a dynamic, multidimensional text in much the same way that Miller conceives of geologic history as an animate record of the past.

Abbotsford has been described as a romance in stone and lime: we have here on the shores of Laig, what seems a wild but agreeable tale, of the extravagant cast of 'Christabel,' or the 'Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner,' fretted into sandstone. But by far the most curious part of the story remains to be told... (CB, 57).

A distinctive feature of Miller's scientific writing is his use of the folkloric narrative. It is a strategy which makes the geological density of the texts more palatable to the amateur reader, at whom Miller was directing his writings. However, the persistence of the morbid supernatural also suggests a more personal stimulus for these. There are several Hebridean folk tales in the pages of *The Cruise of The Betsey*: the history of the 'Dog-stack', the tale of Frances's Cave, the island's female ghost ('a tall withered lady may be seen in the twilight, just yonder where the rocks open, washing a shroud in the stream' (CB, 51) and the story of Ludaig the goblin, among others. This is typical of his approach; in *First Impressions* he focuses on literary anecdotes with a particular fascination for the religious melancholia of Cowper and the supernatural haunting of Lord Lyttelton, while *Rambles of a Geologist* is strewn with tales of fated shipwrecks and hauntings. In stories like these Miller engages his reader in the manner of the *sennachie* of earlier days, inviting his audience into his private thoughts and speculations. Yet beyond Miller's love for the authentic folk narrative there appears to be something equally personally cathartic in several of his stories. The latter two books were written during 1845-47 when Miller was suffering from one of his sporadic bouts of depression. Compared with the earlier composition of *The Cruise of the Betsey*, there is something more violent, more savage in their story telling. There is an almost intrusive return to supernatural subjects in *First Impressions of England*, a book on England's geology and its religious and literary culture which would at first seem to have little cause for such subjects. Tales of

shipwrecks, reminiscent of his father's death, recur in *Rambles of A Geologist*, in a book which Miller confessed to writing under a 'lingering indisposition'. In relating a ghost story in the third chapter Miller recalls the kinds of apparitions that had actually appeared to him 'when lying ill of fever on one occasion' and later, he describes the nature of the nightmares and hallucinations which seem to have beset him during the worst states of his illness:

I was soundly pummelled through the night by a frightful female, who first assumed the appearance of the miserable pauper woman whom I had seen beside the Aulgrande, and then became the Lady of Balconie; and though sufficiently indignant, and much inclined to resist, I could stir neither hand nor foot, but lay passively on my back, jammed fast beside the huge gneiss boulder and the edge of the gulf. And, yet, by a strange duality of perception, I was conscious all the while that, having got wet the previous day, I was now suffering from an attack of nightmare; and held it that it would be no serious matter even should the lady tumble me into the gulf, seeing that all would be well again when I awoke in the morning. (RG, 378)

Just as Miller's natural descriptions could lead him into the realms of mythology and past folklore, so too it could reveal an underlying fascination with the decaying and obscuring process of time and with death itself. In the same way that the scene at Frances's cave in Eigg had led Miller to a site of natural decay, Miller is constantly reflecting on the history of life itself as a history of death. In *Scenes and Legends* his morbid imagination falls upon the realisation that the very earth upon which he stands is composed of the successive layers of the dead: 'a charnel house, not merely of perished individuals, but of extinct tribes'. (S&L, 55) In *The Old Red Sandstone* Miller makes a strikingly human identification with the mass extinction of an ancient species of fish which lay in 'attitudes of fear, anger and pain' (ORS, 232). Miller's conception of a world marked by death derives from his earliest childhood experiences inscribed in the adolescent poetry of *Poems of a Journeyman Mason*, which takes the subject of death and grief as a pervasive theme. If the early poetry

evinces Miller's appeal to God and after-life, then these religious feelings are augmented and confirmed by the time we reach Miller's scientific writing. The early poetry reveals a desire to find refuge in the comforts of Christianity and the father deity. By the mid-1840s Miller's personal appeal to God had matured into a fully developed religious philosophy. The pervasive metaphors of death, decay and suffering in Miller's depiction of natural history become ways of expressing the slow and painful progress of man towards his divine image. In aeon after aeon nature is seen to shed its old skin in its struggle towards God. In his graphic depiction of the Nochian deluge, Miller portrays a natural universe at the mercy of God's wrath being swept away in its imperfection so that life could begin again anew. The process of death is seen as being also the march of progress. With each successive species, Miller found evidence of a progress towards higher and higher forms, the culmination of which was man and the end of which was man made Divine:

Man was the first and is still the only creature of whom we know anything, who has set himself to carry on and improve the work of the world's original framer, - who is a planter of woods, a tiller of fields, and a keeper of gardens [...] It may not be wholly unprofitable to acquaint ourselves, through evidence furnished by the rocks, with the remarkable fact, that the Creator imparted to man the Divine image before he united to man's the Divine nature. (*TR*, 176)

Miller's conception of a natural world infused with the stories of past time and embedded with the graves of a thousand species gives an emotional resonance to his geology. It becomes the source for Miller's natural supernaturalism, for the earth itself is viewed as animate with lives of those dead and living and is testimony to the ultimate path to the Divine which nature tracks.

Alongside Miller's concerns with time, death and the supernatural runs his more pragmatic concern with contemporary ecclesiastical politics in Britain. In *First Impressions* Miller compares the 'iconic medievalism' of the Anglican Church with

the scientific tradition of Scottish Presbyterianism, citing the latter as an example of Scotland's greater intellectual rigour in confronting the abuses of an outdated Church Establishment. One of the primary interests of *The Cruise of the Betsey* is with the effects of the Scottish disruption of 1843. The Established Church's refusal to allow the ministers who had 'walked out' to continue to preach from their former Churches meant that many were homeless and without a place to preach. *The Cruise of the Betsey* tells the story of Miller's friend, the Free Church minister Reverend John Swanson, who conducted his sermons from a boat christened 'Betsey' after the Establishment refused to grant him a building in which to preach to his former parishioners. There is, therefore, an ecclesiastic agenda at hand in the book (which began, one must remember, as a series of articles in *The Witness*). The droll description of the boat's interior highlights the pathetic condition in which his friend was forced to survive, and several passages are intended to illustrate the piteous plight of the Free Church minister. In a particularly rhetorical passage, Miller quotes a lengthy speech apparently made by Swanson which serves, at the book's outset, to remonstrate against the abuses of the Establishment. Following on from the impassioned words of the minister, Miller also narrates the history of the island's drunkard Establishment minister and his petty refusal to give sheep to Swanson upon his arrival. In this way, there is much implicit commentary made on the subject of the Establishment relations with the Free Church ministers, and Miller is able to draw an affecting portrait of a Highland community willing to follow their minister to his scanty place of worship as well as of the preacher's heroic loyalty in ministering to three separate Hebridean islands in all weathers and with only a run-down boat to serve him.

In *First Impressions of England* in 1847 Miller had asserted that ‘the errors committed by the government of the country, in legislating for Scotland in matters of religion as if it were not a separate nation, possessed of a distinct and strongly-marked character of its own, but a mere province of England, have led invariably to disaster and suffering.’ (*FI*, 366) If *First Impressions* served as an outright attack against the failures of Catholicism and the abuses of the Established Church, marking Miller’s position as a distinctively Scottish dissenter championing the values of his native Presbyterianism, then *The Cruise of the Betsey*, whose final essays were completed some two years later, adopts a more subtle and perhaps even conciliatory tone. At the opening of the account, Miller is keen to stress his allegiance with the people of the island Free Church. Describing their gift to him of a pair of traditionally made shoes, he recalls ‘When I came to speak of remuneration, however, the islanders shook their heads. “No, no, not from *The Witness*: there are not many that take our part and *The Witness* does.”’ (*CB*, 18) Miller here represents himself as the defending executor of the people’s religion. At the book’s end, however, Miller describes a meeting with a minister of the Establishment: ‘In short, we agreed on a great many different matters; and, by comparing notes, we made the best we could of a tedious journey and a very bad day.’ (*CB*, 161) When the Establishment minister comes to enquire of Miller’s identity and he reveals his position as editor of *The Witness*, ‘there was a momentary pause. “Well,” said the minister, “it’s all the same: I’m glad we should have met. Give me, man, a shake of your hand.” And so the conversation went on as before until we parted at Dingwall, - the Establishment clergyman wet to the skin, the Free Church editor in no better condition’. (*CB*, 161) One wonders if the fires of Miller’s combativeness in ecclesiastic affairs had not cooled a little by 1849, when Chalmers was long gone and Candlish firmly in the ascendant. Just as David Robb detects a

certain note of withdrawal from the bellicosity of former battles in *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, so too, while *The Cruise of the Betsey* continues to evince Miller's strong sympathy with the Free Church cause, there is an implicit sense that by 1849 he was willing to bid a civil farewell to the storms of Church controversy.

Scientific Rhetoric and Narrative Style

Miller's scientific prose style is deliberately inclusive. More than anything, Miller's intention was to make scientific study accessible and appealing. His *Sketch Book of Popular Geology* (posthumously collected by Lydia Miller and published in 1859), originally a series of lectures delivered to a non-specialist audience,¹⁷ convey Miller's eloquence and transparency in expressing what might otherwise become an abstract subject burdened by unfamiliar factual language. Less eclectic than *The Cruise of the Betsey* or *Rambles of a Geologist*, the *Sketch Book* is nevertheless animated with allusions to Celtic history, literary reference, folk mythology and historical anecdote. One of Miller's most distinctive abilities in his scientific writing is his capacity for lucid description and precise scientific metaphor. In *My Schools and Schoolmasters* (similarly addressed to a popular audience) Miller's description of his capture and vivisection of the loligo is vivid:

I heard a peculiar sound, a *squelch*, if I may employ such a word – and saw that a large loligo, fully a foot and a half in length, had thrown itself high and dry upon the beach. I lay hold of it by its sheath or sack; and the loligo, in turn, laid hold of the pebbles, just as I have seen a boy, when borne off against his will by one stronger than himself, grasping fast to door-posts and furniture. The pebbles were hard and smooth but the creature raised them very readily with his suckers. I subjected one of my hands to its grasp, and it seized fast hold; but though the suckers were still employed, it made use of them in a different principle.

¹⁷ Lydia notes in the Preface that Miller had intended, along with *The Cruise of the Betsey* and *Rambles of a Geologist* to turn into his *magnum opus*, 'The Geology of Scotland,' a project which he unfortunately never realised. The *Sketch Book* presents the first six of eight lectures on geology, which Miller delivered to the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution during 1855 (the final two comprise the fifth and sixth chapters of *Testimony of the Rocks*).

Around the circular rim of each there is a fringe of minute thorns, hooked somewhat like those of the wild rose. In clinging to the hard polished pebbles, these were overlapped by a fleshy membrane, much in the manner that the cushions of a cat's paw overlap its claws when the animal is in a state of tranquillity; and by means of the projecting membrane, the hollow interior was rendered air-tight and the vacuum completed: but in dealing with the hand – a soft substance – the thorns were laid bare, like the claws of a cat when stretched out in anger, and at least a thousand minute prickles were fixed in the skin at once. They failed to penetrate it, for they were short, and individually not strong; but, acting together by hundreds, they took at least a very firm hold. (S&S, 444-5)

Miller goes on to describe the insides of the fish upon vivisection with its 'yellow muscular heart', its 'gizzard-like stomach' and 'spongy, conical, yellowish-coloured liver', the loligo's ink-bag 'resembling in form a Florence flask [...] with its deep dark sepia'. Here the humble loligo is described as possessing the desperation of a child, the protective defensiveness of a cat and later depicted with the exotic intricacy of a Florence flask. Elsewhere in Miller's scientific prose, fishes, reptiles, plants and stones partake of the character of Gothic architecture, engraved furniture, ships, libraries, cemeteries and even workmen's tools. Miller's particular gift for description and metaphor must have derived, at least in part, from his poetic faculty. But where Miller lacked the inventive ability to turn what is familiar into something startling and original, he possessed instead the gift of describing with eloquent precision what lay before his eyes and of transforming the unintelligible into a perfectly crafted image.

In *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, Miller declared that 'much of the interest of a science such as geology must consist in the ability of making dead deposits represent living scenes'. (S&S, 503) This intention is fully realised in his scientific prose. In the *Sketch Book* lectures, Miller sought to take his audience on a virtual journey through the scenes of the pre-civilised past animating his document with vivid description. The lectures are characterised by an impassioned, energetic narrative, the account written in the immediate present tense ('Ages pass [...] the ice disappears' (SBG, 61))

and addressed directly to his audience. Miller invites his audience not only to follow him in his journey but also to listen to, to smell and to sense the animate environments of the past. In lecture three Miller invites his audience for 'a short walk into the world of the Oolite', ending his narrative with the arrival of the dinosaurs and introducing the strange and grotesque features of the Iguandan, the Plesiosaurus and the Fish-lizard. As the lectures draw to their close and Miller draws his final descriptions of the unfamiliar environs of ancient geologic time, the narrative tempo slows to its conclusion: 'But the night grows dangerous, and these monster-haunted woods were not planted for man. Let us return then to the safer and better furnished world of the present time, and to our secure and quiet homes.' (*SBG*, 150) It is this unique combination of narrative immediacy, vivid description and Miller's ability to draw the natural world in colours that highlight its relationship to the human and spiritual world that gives his scientific prose its distinctive literary and rhetorical value.

Geo-Theology

In the opening chapter of the *Sketch Book of Popular Geology* Miller stressed that geological history was neither dull nor abstract but animate with interest and meaning:

[Geology's] landscapes are tablets roughened, like the tablets of Nineveh, with the records of the past; and their various features, whether hill or valley, terrace or escarpment, form the bold and graceful characters in which the narrative is inscribed. (*SBG*, 17)

His words convey the profound sense of awe with which Miller read the pages of geological discovery. Indeed, for Miller, it was of primary importance that the audiences of his time understood the imaginative power of science. The reverence with which Miller clearly regarded the natural world is intended not only to instruct but equally to inspire:

It is said that modern science is adverse to the exercise and development of the imaginative faculty. But is it really so? Are visions such as those in which we have been indulging less richly charged with that poetic pabulum on which fancy feeds and grows strong, than those ancient tales of enchantment and *faery* which beguiled of old, in solitary homesteads, the long winter nights [...] Nor is it the material laws, we may, on the same principle, say to the poets of the querulous cast, that are overbearing your little inventions and making them seem small, but those sublime actings of the Creator which they unveil, and bring into comparison with yours [...] The great poet [...] will find sermons in stones, and more of the suggestive and sublime in a few broken scaurs of clay, a few fragmentary shells, and a few green reaches of old coast line, than versifiers of the ordinary calibre in their once fresh gems and flowers, - in sublime ocean, the broad earth, or the blue firmament and all its stars. (*SBG*, 79-80)

The reverence which emanates from all Miller's scientific writings derives from his profound identification of Nature with God. And it is perhaps this theological element of Miller's writing which has made the most lasting mark upon his reputation as a scientist.

In 1855 Miller published *The Testimony of the Rocks*, a reply to the anonymous pro-evolutionary *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, written by Robert Chambers, the successful Edinburgh publisher and a friend and patron of Miller himself. Miller never discovered Chambers's identity as the author of the book, which was probably published anonymously in order to avoid the kind of disapprobation which Miller so fiercely exemplified. The nineteenth-century debate about the nature of evolution can be traced as far back as the eighteenth century when the French writer Benoit de Maillet published the *Telliamed* (1748), an important, if somewhat fantastical, work in advancing the developmental theory. Miller had read and rejected de Maillet, instead adhering to the findings of the Scottish geologist James Hutton.¹⁸

¹⁸ Hutton had rejected de Maillet's 'Neptunism' which proposed that the accumulation of stratified land masses arose from the retreating action of the ocean. Such an interpretation allowed for a scientific defence of the Nochian deluge. Hutton, however, advanced the theory that strata were exposed from the seabed by the forces of internal pressure acting deep within the earth. This developmental approach allowed for a 'catastrophic' theory of development, namely that the earlier geological activity directed by the hand of the Creator was more powerful than that of today, when land mass was sufficient for

De Maillet's 'retreating ocean' theory gained wide popularity in the eighteenth century but none of its supporters went further in their refusal to compromise with the Genesis story until the work of his countryman, Jean Baptiste Lamarck. Lamarck's *Philosophie Zoologique* (1802) proposed the radical theory that organisms themselves developed structural changes within their own lifetimes as an adaptation to their particular environment and that these were passed on through successive generations by sexual reproduction. Then in 1822 the Scottish geologist Charles Lyell further challenged the biblical record by asserting, in his *Principles of Geology* (1822), that counter to the religious assumptions of the eighteenth century which fixed the antiquity of the earth some mere 4,000 years B.C., geologic evidence suggested that evolution had taken place gradually over an extremely long period of time. The notion of the seven-day creation was fundamentally challenged in a manner that many thought heretical. Throughout the nineteenth century scientists, churchmen and laymen of both creeds rallied to the causes of God and science. For many, it was a debate between faith and infidelity, between the truth of the Bible and the veracity of man's scientific endeavour. In time, the debate polarised into the antithetical position of the developmental theorists, who argued for scientific evolution, versus the creationists, who insisted upon the intervention of the divine principle. Throughout the early nineteenth century, the proponents of the creationist theory remained in the majority with Hugh Miller as one of their most vociferous and intelligent defenders. As early as 1841 his *Old Red Sandstone* scorned Lamarck:

And such but still more glaringly, had been the error of Lamarck. He has argued on this principle of improvement and adaptation, - which, carry it as far as we rationally may, still leaves the vegetable a vegetable, and the dog a dog, - that in the vast course of ages, inferior have risen into superior natures and lower into

human survival. From this the fundamental conclusion was derived that the forces acting upon the past need not be the same as those acting upon the present and that observable causes are not fully adequate in geology.

higher races; that molluscs and zoophytes have passed into fish and reptiles, and fish and reptiles into birds and quadrupeds; that unformed gelatinous bodies, with an organisation scarcely traceable, have been metamorphosed into oaks and cedars; and that monkeys and apes have been transformed into human creatures, capable of understanding and admiring the theories of Lamarck. Assuredly, there is no lack of faith among infidels: their vaulting credulity o'erleaps revelation, and "falls on the other side." (ORS, 67)

Miller was not being religiously dogmatic in refuting the development theory, however. He simply could not find evidence from his own researches for evolutionary theory. For him, the discoveries of the old red sandstone disproved the development theory by confounding the notion of gradation with that of consistent evidence of degradation.

There is no progression. If fish rose into reptiles, it must have been by sudden transformation, - it must have been as if a man who had stood still for half a lifetime should bestir himself all at once, and take seven leagues at a stride. There is no getting rid of miracle in the case, - there is no alternative between creation and metamorphosis. The infidel substitutes progression for Deity; - Geology robs him of his God. (ORS, 70)¹⁹

Later, in his *Footprints of the Creator*, he argued that development and progression only appeared to take place in biological environments but not in the organisms themselves. This allowed for the intervention of God who could be seen to be refining natural conditions to allow for the eventual ascendance of man in the chain of being. *Footprints of the Creator* formed Miller's reply to Chambers's anonymous continuation of the Lamarckian theory of development (but with the added theology that God created natural laws and then stepped back.) Of all the replies to the *Vestiges*, Miller's *Footprints of the Creator* was the most widely read. In it, he was as damning of the author's theory as he had been of Lamarckism. For Miller, the danger of the development theory was that it held that all men were descended from beasts

¹⁹ For a diagrammatic illustration of this argument, see Appendix G.

and therefore implied that either all living creatures possess an immortal soul as man was thought to, or inversely, that they had none:

If, during a period so vast as to be scarce expressible by figures, the creatures now human have been rising, by *almost* infinitesimals, from compound microscopic cells [...] until they have at length become the men and women we see around us, we must hold either the monstrous belief, that all the vitalities, whether those of monads or of mites, of fishes or of reptiles, of birds or of beasts, are individually and inherently immortal and undying, or that human souls *are not* so [...] how can it be held that a mere progressive step [...] or a single atom to a body in the growing state, could ever have produced immortality? [...] The belief which is perhaps of all others the most fundamentally essential to the revealed scheme of salvation, is the belief that 'God created man upright,' and that man, instead of proceeding onward and upward from this high and fair beginning, to a yet higher and fairer standing in the scheme of creation, sank, and became morally lost and degraded. And hence the necessity for that second dispensation of recovery and restoration which forms the entire burden of God's revealed message to man. (*FC*, 13,15)

If the 'first Adam,' as Miller names man, was followed by an upward progress through an inherent biological predisposition, then there would be no need for the scheme of salvation and the development theory would thus render Christianity 'a meaningless anomaly' and 'an idle and unsightly excrescence on a code of morals that would be perfect were it away'. This was more than Miller could accept and he fought with all logical rigour to disprove Chambers's principle of biological progression.

In the same way, Miller found no evidence for a slow and gradual process of evolution from lower into higher species. To Miller, change appeared to take place with a remarkable suddenness. The abrupt nature of geological change appeared to Miller to signal the sudden intervention of God, and he described these points of change as 'evolutionary fiats' (see Appendix F) of 'catastrophic' change. Miller did not fight shy, however, of engagement with the implications of scientific evidence upon the biblical record. He accepted an extended antiquity of the earth, arguing that the seven-day creation of Genesis might act as a metaphor for the gradual stages of

epochal development (which he had conveniently enumerated into six stages). The last, or seventh stage formed the crux of Miller's geo-theology. On the seventh day, Genesis states, God rested from his labours. So too would the seventh day of man, the Sabbath, be his day of rest. For on the seventh day man would worship God and in his praise of his Creator would cultivate his own divinity until eventually he could approach God in His image.

Yet again however, the elevatory fiat went forth, and through *an act of creation*, the dynasty of the mammiferous quadruped began. And after the further lapse of ages, the elevatory fiat went forth yet once more in *an act of creation*; and with the human, heaven-aspiring dynasty, the moral government of God, in its connection with at least the world which we inhabit, "took beginning." And then creation ceased. Why? Simply because God's moral government had *begun*, - because in necessary conformity with the institution of that government, there was to be a thorough identity maintained between the glorified and immortal beings of the terminal dynasty, and the dying magnates of the dynasty that now is. (FC, 294)

Miller's *Footprints of the Creator* gained him many influential admirers in the scientific world but he also made enemies, some well placed within the Scottish establishment. It is perhaps as a result of this, as George Rosie has speculated, that Miller was passed over for the Chair of Natural History at Edinburgh University in 1853, despite his growing popularity and the recommendation of some very influential supporters. Miller did not always fight the winning cause and it appears that the disappointments that beset his religious career were to feature in his scientific career also. Nevertheless, and despite an increasing credit given to developmental evolutionary theories, Miller continued to argue for the divine basis of creation up until his death in 1856. He was still correcting the proofs of his final words on this subject on the night of his own suicide, a fact which has led several critics to forge an erroneous link between Miller's philosophical and scientific pursuits and the internal conditions of his own decline. In 1857, Lydia Miller gathered up the last of Miller's

scientific rhetoric into his *The Testimony of the Rocks*. Rosie conveys the vibrancy and skill of this final piece of Miller's work in his tribute that:

In many ways *The Testimony of the Rocks* is Miller's most interesting book: it is beautifully illustrated in some editions, eclectic and quirky, and Miller slips from finely-honed argument on, for instance, the palaeontology of plants to a rambling discourse on the mythological basis of Noah's flood, the cosmogonies of the Buddhists and Hindus, and the problems faced by astronomers such as Galileo, Tyco Brahe, and Kelper.²⁰

In this, *The Testimony of the Rocks* has all the qualities of Miller's best scientific prose. Philosophically, it stood as Miller's last defence of Creationism. This time, Miller proceeded largely upon the 'argument from design,' utilising a consistent architectural metaphor to illustrate the remarkable handiwork of nature's Creator: 'First then, I must hold that we receive the true explanation of the man-like character of the Creator's workings ere man was, in the remarkable text in which we are told that "God made man in his own image and likeness"'. ((Genesis 1: 26-27) *TR*, 196)²¹ The testimony which the rocks attest is the existence of a First Great Cause, a beginning that marks Time and a hand that shaped Life: 'The infinite series of the atheists of former times can have no place in modern science; all organic existences, recent or extinct, vegetable or animal, have had their beginning; there was a time when they were not. The geologist can indicate that time'. (*TR*, 160) And thus Miller stresses the 'important consequences to the natural theologian [of] this fact of *beginning* itself'. (*TR*, 163) In his ninth lecture, 'The Discoverable and the Revealed', Miller condemned those theologians who rejected the evidences of science, arguing that such myopia could only endanger the Church with the threat of blind faith. He answers both the dogmatic churchman and the sceptical scientist in asserting that it is

²⁰ George Rosie, *Outrage and Order*, p. 77.

²¹ The argument from design in Miller's *The Testimony of the Rocks* and his science writing in general is given extensive treatment in John Hedley Brooke's essay 'Like Minds: the God of Hugh Miller' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science* (see Shortland, above).

not the *authorship* of Revelation that is false but that its overly literal interpretation may lead to false science. There are, he states, two kinds of knowledge: that which is taught and that which is learned oneself. God taught revelation but not science – which man was capable of discovering for himself. Arguing from Baconian empiricism, Miller asserts that the geologist does not proceed from Revelation, which was never intended as a scientific record, but from empirical evidence from which he finds proof of Revelation. He attempts at every turn to defend his theology with scientific rigour. In lecture ten, ‘The Geology of the Anti-Geologists’, Miller mocked the narrow-minded theologians who gave no credence to scientific theory whatsoever. In science and religion Miller found profound beauty; God was to lend science its design and science, to religion, its testimony. In *First Impressions* he expresses this sentiment most eloquently:

And such is the sublime prospect presented to the geologist as he turns him towards the shoreless ocean of the upper eternity. The mere theologian views that boundless expanse from a flat, and there lies in front of him nothing but the narrow strip of the existing creation [...] while to the eye purged and strengthened by the euphrasy of science, the many vast regions of other creations, - promontory beyond promontory – island beyond island – stretch out in sublime succession into that boundless ocean of eternity. (*FI*, 308-9)

In Miller, science and religion, the sublime and the rational, stand not in opposition but in profound unity.

Criticism, literary and scientific, has accorded little place to Hugh Miller’s geological writing. As several of Miller’s critics have noted, he fell foul of the Darwinian ascendancy and has since tended to be regarded as anachronistic and reactionary in his scientific thinking. While he still retains a place within the records of evolutionary history, this is largely for his representative popularity as an opponent to evolutionary

theory,²² while other critics regard him as important largely for his influence upon the Scottish geologist Archibald Geikie.²³ Certainly, the obscurity of developmental versus creationist debate renders much of Miller's scientific writing inaccessible to the present-day generalist. The fact that Miller's subject matter is now less relevant does not obscure his validity as a successful and admired populariser of Victorian science. As such, Miller belongs among the established canon of scientific writers such as William Paley, Charles Babbage and James Clerk Maxwell each of whom attempted to bridge the post-Cartesian chasm between science and religion.

Indeed, contemporary science may yet return to Miller some of his former credibility. As Rosie noted, Miller's attacks on the developmental theory in his reply to *Vestiges of Creation* latched on to the very flaws in the evolution argument which continue to vex contemporary geologists and palaeontologists. More recently James Bowler has identified the re-emergence of modern creationism in a growing interrogation of the Darwinian paradigm. The contemporary readings of scientists such as Stephen Jay Gould, Fritjof Capra and Ilya Prigogine supported by the finding of chaos theory and quantum physics have re-examined the Cartesian dualism, proposing a new radical and non-reductionist paradigm in a manner that recalls Miller's own conception of immaterial forces at work in the physical world.²⁴

²² See Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea* (California: University of California Press, 1989).

²³ This is the view of both David R. Oldroyd and John Hedley Brooke.

²⁴ The award-winning Harvard biologist, Stephen Jay Gould (1941 - 2002) argued that evolution is not a slow continuous development but is punctuated by sudden fluctuations and shifts. His argument strikingly recalls Miller's evolutionary 'fiats' (See Appendix F). In his *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (1999), Gould argued that science and religion are not contradictory. Russian born physicist and winner of the Nobel prize for Chemistry (1957) Ilya Prigogine, in *Order out of Chaos* (1983) and *The End of Certainty: Time, Chaos and the New Laws of Nature* (1997), has refuted traditional scientific determinism, suggesting that the paradigm of structural 'order' within nature is, in fact, flux and chaos. Fritjof Capra has taken the ideas of these thinkers alongside Eastern philosophy in his critically acclaimed *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism* (1975) and *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems* (1996) in which he argues, 'My thesis has been that a theory of living systems [...] implying a non-mechanistic, post-Cartesian understanding of life is now emerging.'

It is not the purpose of this thesis, however, to assess the academic importance of Miller's scientific contribution. The geological writing undertaken by Miller between the years of 1841 until his death in 1856 marks the final development of his prose voice. While Miller continued to write for *The Witness* until the final days of his life, one senses that the task was increasingly a burden and that he came to view his scientific pursuits as a welcome relief from the pressures of topical, and often adversarial, journalism. Miller's relative detachment from ecclesiastic matters after 1847 did not signal a wish to disengage from philosophical, theological and contemporary debate. Rather, it marked his resistance to the institutional constraints increasingly placed upon his authorial autonomy. With his editorial authority threatened under Candlish's leadership, Miller could instead claim a new authority under the auspices of the scientific community. If his earlier prose represented his attempt to define his position in relation to the rest of the world, then the scientific writing of his later years conveys the assurance of authorial establishment. From his position as a recognised and commercially successful man of science, Miller delivered some of the most rigorous and eloquent scientific expositions of his time. However, even here, despite several influential supporters, in 1855 Miller was passed over for the Chair of natural history at the University of Edinburgh. Once again institutional recognition had ultimately eluded him.

Miller's scientific writing was not classically academic, however. His interest lay outside the confines of pure research. Miller championed scientific endeavour, not merely for its philosophical possibilities but as an example of pragmatic self-education. From this vantage point Miller continued with much the same agenda that he had pursued in his *Witness* writings; he remains eclectic in his approach, politically and socially engaged, even didactic, and resolutely self-reflexive. If Claude Bernard's

maxim that art expresses self while science expresses relation is true, then it comes with the significant caveat that Miller's scientific writing never strayed far from the personal. The significance of the autobiographical framework in Miller's scientific writing should not be underestimated. It allowed him to continue in his function as an exemplar to the working man, directing his efforts towards self-education and away from frivolous pursuits and false politics. As a popular science writer his experience in quarry and field served to ground the abstractions of scientific exposition in a style that was intimate, direct and imaginatively accessible.

Even in scientific pursuits Miller resisted narrow specialisation. The generic eclecticism that features in Miller's earlier writing persists. For Miller the geological narrative contained profound philosophical, folkloric and theological reverberations. Indeed the marriage of science and religion in Miller's geo-theological argument from a crucial aspect of his synthesising vision. Despite the confrontational atmosphere surrounding the debate between science and religion in the nineteenth century, in Miller's movement into scientific writing there is a perceptible transference of the metaphysics of religion into those of science, which in Miller's view posed one in the same question: from what did man originate and in what direction was he evolving? His understanding of the material world was co-existent with his profound belief in the immaterial forces that shaped them. Science was not, for Miller, mere 'matter' but a transcendental revelation of the divine spirit. In Miller's scientific narrative the ethereal, the social and the material cohere: through his voluntarist acceptance of God's ultimate inscrutability, Miller resisted a conservative pietism. Just as God had rested from his labours on the seventh day of creation so to must man labour to perfect his world in the divine image and upon his Sabbath-day rest in God. Miller's writing makes a tireless commitment to the cause of divine creation. In his final

ventures into the world of science - the world of 'us' rather than the world of 'I' - Miller is making one final request of his readership: that they participate in his ultimate vision of a spiritual, altruistic and self-improving universe.

Chapter Nine:

The Fiction of Identity: Miller and the Autobiographical Framework

‘[The] most important of all the branches of philosophy [is] the philosophy of one’s own life’
Hugh Miller¹

The Autobiographical Framework

In searching for an appropriate vehicle of self-expression, one narrative trajectory unifies Miller’s multiple voices: the story of his own life. Several critics have noted the autobiographical aspect of Miller’s approach. In a review of Miller’s *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, the *North British Review* observed that ‘an autobiographic vein runs throughout most of his writing, even those which are geological’.² Peter Bayne in the *London Quarterly Review*, several years later, recorded that ‘Hugh Miller’s whole writings are in the strictest sense autobiographical [...] His life thus made a continual commentary on itself’.³ More recently, both James Robertson and David Alston have highlighted these aspects of Miller’s writing⁴, while Michael Shortland has observed the autobiographical tendency in Miller’s *Witness* articles⁵ and David Oldroyd has described Miller’s scientific prose as ‘as much autobiographical as descriptive’.⁶ From Miller’s earliest years, the autobiographical impulse is present. In transcribing copies of all his personal correspondence, as we have seen, Miller demonstrates an early interest in the record of his own life while the 1828 project of ‘Things which I intend doing’

¹ Hugh Miller, letter to Miss Dunbar of Boath, LB64 (24 July, 1833).

² ‘Hugh Miller of Cromarty,’ *North British Review* 21 (1854), pp. 329-74 (p.334).

³ Peter Bayne, ‘Hugh Miller’s Life and Letters,’ *London Quarterly Review* 36 (1871), pp. 439-61 (p. 440).

⁴ James Robertson notes that, ‘Miller wrote and rewrote himself working over the events of his upbringing until he had himself right’ (‘Scenes and Legends of the North: Feeding a Youthful Imagination’ in *Hugh Miller in Context*, (see Borley, above), pp. 17-26 (p. 22)). In a similar way, David Alston in ‘The Fallen Meteor: Hugh Miller and Local Tradition’ in *Hugh Miller And The Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above), has recognised the semi-autobiographical nature of Miller’s folkloric *Scenes and Legends*.

⁵ Michael Shortland, ‘Hugh Miller’s Contribution to *The Witness*’ in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above), p. 295.

⁶ David Oldroyd, ‘The Geologist from Cromarty’, in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above), p. 77.

includes autobiography, cultural record and biography much as is realised in *My Schools and Schoolmasters*. Furthermore, his 1829 poems are notable, not for their artistic inventiveness but for the psychological insight which they reveal into the early experiences of Miller's life.⁷ 'Life, A Poem,' is Miller's first approach towards a public autobiographical narrative. Several of Miller's short stories also possess autobiographical features. 'The Salmon Fisher of Udoll,' written for *Wilson's Tales of the Borders*, tells the story of a love affair between a self-made man and a young woman whose father rejects matrimony on the basis that her suitor is insufficiently advanced in social standing. The young man, a fisherman, who writes poetry in his leisure hours, and the girl, whose name is Lillias, are recastings of Miller himself and Lydia Fraser, written around the period when Miller was still seeking to raise his social standing in order to meet the approval of Mrs Fraser in taking her daughter's hand in marriage. In other tales, as we have seen, Miller presents his narrative as a re-telling of events from his own life, as in the short stories 'The Lykewake' and 'Bill Whyte,' or recasts himself as a fictional participant in the biographies of others, as in the 'Recollections' of Fergusson and Burns. As Miller continued to write, he grounded his observations and stories in the experiences gained in his own life so that autobiographical elements feature in all his subsequent writings from history to science. When Miller came to write his final autobiographical record in *My Schools and Schoolmasters* in 1854, a similar generic eclecticism manifests in the telling of his own life story. *My Schools and Schoolmasters* includes poetry, folklore, traditional history and biography, each of these revealing the different ways in which Miller was interested in preserving a record of the past, personal, social and cultural. While *My Schools and Schoolmasters* often ventures far from the subject of Miller's 'self,'

⁷ Taken together, they express Miller's grief over his father's death, his guilt at his inability to grieve and at surviving his sisters' death in early childhood.

however, all these interests are framed by his autobiographical impulse, the desire to make sense of the world as it is viewed through the window of one's own experience.

Miller's autobiographical trajectory provided the means by which he was able to achieve several significant aims. Firstly, it allowed him a crucial autonomy in fashioning his public persona, a persona intended to mediate between working integrity and literary authority whilst it also allowed him to project his role as a self-cultivated literary 'exemplar' to working men. Secondly, Miller promoted the autobiography as a means of granting narrative autonomy to the neglected working-class voice. Finally, the compacting narrative of autobiography served the implicit function of integrating the disparate strands of Miller's life and interests in a way that offered a coherent and unified projection of his identity. This last functioned in Miller's case to offer a corrective response to the antithetic, antagonistic and often paradoxical image which he occupied in the public eye. Yet there is a more profoundly psychological agenda fulfilled in the autobiographical project. The desire for a coherent narrative of the self is the (perhaps subconscious) intention of all self-reflexive writing and Miller's conflation of his narrative of self with a narrative of a past Scotland suggests a deeper desire to identify with, and even return to, a nostalgic state of grace.

Self-Fashioning The Working-Class Exemplar

'Of all his stories he was himself the hero; and certainly most wonderful was the invention of the man'
Hugh Miller⁸

As discussed in Part I, an element of 'self-fashioning' was crucial to Miller's self-conscious mediation of the values of working-class integrity and the attainment of literary authority as expressed in his public persona. The role of the literary Cromarty stonemason, promulgated as early as 1829 in Miller's early letters seeking patronage

⁸ Hugh Miller, *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, p.199.

and in his first published work, *Poems Written in the Leisure Hours of a Journeyman Mason*, was sustained throughout his entire working career, and long after he had abandoned a labouring life. In *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, Miller appears once more as the storyteller of community history, a *sennachie* for the lore of his people. In *The Witness*, he is the thundering voice of the working man, validating his editorial analysis of politics and social affairs against the touchstone of his own empirical knowledge of a labouring life. In *The Old Red Sandstone* and *The Cruise of The Betsey* he is the nomadic geologist, cracking open the secrets of the earth with his mason's mallet and recording his experience as part of the continuing narrative of his life in the traditional communities of the north of Scotland. In *First Impressions of England*, he is again the ponderous but humble traveller, passing through the inns of English villages, journeying on the stagecoaches of English roads. Here he plays the role of the generic Scotsman, frank, polite, quietly pious, abroad in the foreign sister culture of the British Union. And in all these works Miller's observations, his reflections, his experiences, are refracted through the omnipresent narrator himself, an active participant in all he records, demonstrating a particular understanding of society and the world as perceived through the eyes of the traditional, rural working Scotsman.

Philippe Lejeune, in his *Le Pacte Autobiographique* (1996), has offered perhaps the most concrete description of the autobiographical genre, defining it as: 'a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real-life person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality'.⁹ From this specific definition, Lejeune stipulated that the autobiography require at least four categories: linguistically, that the autobiography take the form of narrative or prose; that the subject treated be the personal history of an individual life;

that the author and the narrator be identical and finally, that the narrator and protagonist are identical and narrate a retrospective account.¹⁰ According to these terms, Miller wrote three works that are explicitly autobiographical: his (private) autobiographical letter to George Husband Baird in 1829, his (public) article, 'Gropings of a Working Man Geologist' in *Chambers Edinburgh Journal* in 1838, and his 'official' autobiography, *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, printed serially in *The Witness* in 1853 and published in 1854. However, the specific terms of Lejeune's definition are further useful in identifying the extent to which Miller's narratives conform to a prescriptive interpretation of the genre and, further, in extrapolating Miller's own characteristic conception of the autobiographical function, which I discuss later.

In 1829 Reverend George Baird, then Principal of Edinburgh University, invited Miller to write an account of his self-education.¹¹ Baird's interest in Miller derived

⁹ Phillipe Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Contract' translated by R. Carter in *French Literary Theory Today: A Reader* ed. by Tzvetan Todorov (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) pp. 192-223. (p. 193).

¹⁰ In approaching the genre of autobiography in the writing of Hugh Miller, it has been necessary to assume an implicit critical-theoretical position. I have adopted the 'positivist' definition of autobiography outlined by Phillipe Lejeune combined with the paradigmatic approach of social historians such as David Vincent and Mark Traugott as well as cultural theorists such as Regenia Gagnier. Lejeune posits a concrete, material model for autobiography (as set against the transcendental reading of genre, in relation to the autobiography, offered by the post-structuralists). Social-historical and cultural readings tend to ground interpretations of autobiography within an analysis of social and historical consciousness. For these reasons, such readings are more sensitive to the particular politics and ideological 'subjectivities' of working-class autobiography within which Miller should be contextualised. Lejeune's assumption of an empirical reality outside the 'self' of the self-referential text, as well as the cultural theorists' interrogation of the social praxis which informs a particular autobiography within time, seems most appropriate to the essentialist and culturally-bound perspective which informs Miller's own viewpoint within nineteenth-century Scotland.

This thesis is concerned to examine how Miller expressed his experience within the context of his own times. I am less concerned, therefore, to impose contemporary (retrospective) analyses upon my reading of Miller. I have, nevertheless, applied deconstruction theory where I consider it useful in illuminating aspects of Miller's autobiographical approach. Post-structuralist readings deconstruct the very positivism asserted by theorists such as Lejeune, using the genre of autobiography to interrogate the notion of subjectivity itself – as well as all its philosophical implications, outlined by the Derridean critic, Robert Smith, as: 'self-identity, self-reference, self-presence, autonomy, authority, self-determinism, individualism, auto-affection, self-constitution, and so on'. (*Derrida and Autobiography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 59) Several of these concepts, as we shall see, are crucial to an understanding of Miller's ideological self-positioning in his autobiographical writing.

¹¹ The 'letter' is transcribed from the original 1829 copy in 'Hugh Miller's Letterbook' and published for the first time in *Hugh Miller's Memoir: From Stonemason to Geologist*, ed. by Michael Shortland (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995). Because *Hugh Miller's Memoir* contains both analysis by Shortland as well as the reprinted text to Baird by Hugh Miller, I will abbreviate different sections of

from the principal's support for the extension of Highland education, for which he was known all over Scotland. In suggesting that Miller write an account of his intellectual abilities in spite of the deficiencies of his education, Baird appears to have had in mind a brief analytical essay, which he could use in his campaign to reform rural education. However, Miller actually chose to take Baird's invitation as an opportunity to present a first autobiographical account, a project which his 1828 list of 'Things I intend doing' show he had been contemplating for some time. In this way he was enabled to fashion a first 'profile' of his personal and literary credentials. Miller took the offer from Baird as an excuse to execute a literary self-promotion with the intention of inviting literary exposure and patronage.

Miller introduces himself, in the opening of the first letter as one 'determined on coming before the Public as a writer of verse [...] with a mixed feeling of solicitude and indifference'. ('letter to Baird', 89) He recognises that his artistic skill is 'imperfect' and so Miller offers himself to Baird as a figure of interest, if not in his artistic merit, then in the attractions and curiosities of his own life story:

The history of what I may term my education, is also that of my life; and though it were no great matter though the Public should have to say to me 'This mason writes ill,' I would deem it a truly serious one should Principal Baird have to say of me, 'He has lived well.' ('letter to Baird', 89)

The story he presents to Baird is of a rebellious rural lad, given over to truancy and adventure yet possessed of a keen intelligence and defiant sense of independence. Characteristically, his life story begins with the mythology of his father: 'My father's whole life had been spent in a war with fortune [...] He had sailed over almost every

the book according to their authorship and working title. From here on I will refer to the letter to Baird with the page references from this publication abbreviated as 'letter to Baird'. I will refer to Hugh Miller's autobiographical account 'Gropings of a Working Man Geologist' reprinted from *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal*, with its full title, while quotations from Shortland's own commentary I will reference separately under the book's title: *Hugh Miller's Memoir*.

ocean, he had fought both by land and sea, and he had suffered from famine, tempest and shipwreck.' ('letter to Baird', 91) He was keen to stress the inheritance of this heroic spirit, and the 1829 account emphasises Miller's role as 'the leader of a band of the boldest and most intelligent lads of the school'. Miller appears to wish to cast himself in the role of the solitary hero and rebel leader of romantic fiction popular at that time:

Some of my exploits of this period were of a rather disreputable cast. I loved dearly to be actively employed in a good cause either in doing or suffering; but just causes of exertion or endurance are not often presented and I thought it hard to be debarred being a hero through mere lack of opportunity. As I could not in the course of my errantry find giants to encounter, I became a giant myself: and my boys to whom I was both thought and impulse, were taught rather how to blend courage with caution, than a principle of justice with either. ('letter to Baird', 102-3)

Despite the tone of gentle self-mocking here, the suggestion that Miller is both rebellious and somewhat superior to his peers is sustained throughout the account (he continues to refer to his childhood companions as 'my boys'). No doubt this sense of superiority arose from Miller's precocious intelligence and Miller is, indeed, keen to stress his intellectual gifts. Listing his various creative and intellectual pursuits, beginning with chemistry and proceeding to painting, lead sculpture, mosaic work, palmistry and astrology, the account is also strewn with literary references from Homer to Dryden, Goldsmith, Macpherson and the whole corpus of Miller's early favourites. Nevertheless, Miller also wishes to balance the portrayal of natural intelligence and creativity against a volatile and reckless temperament, a composite characterisation that neatly links him to the 'peasant poet' mythology perpetuated by Burns. To Baird he writes: 'It is a consequence of my having been so wild and reckless as a schoolboy that I am now a journeyman mason' ('letter to Baird', 111) an observation which eschews the fact that he was offered the opportunity to attend University but refused. Miller's

narrative has more poetic coherence as the story of a wilful youth from the rural north passing into obscure working life despite his intellectual attainments and shining as a diamond in the rough. The first letter of Miller's account ends by way of reference to his literary works and the reception of the critics – a conclusion no doubt intended to highlight Miller's distinctive literary credentials despite his 'humble' working background.

The second letter continues with an account of Miller's working life. This letter contains the possibly apocryphal account of Miller's decision to quit alcohol because drink prevented him from reading his favourite philosopher. He depicts himself as a man apart, a man of the mind amidst physical labourers, recalling: 'As I was disgusted rather than amused by scenes so savagely rude, I kept as much aloof from the barrack as possible'. ('letter to Baird', 135) Just as he had stood apart from the barbarity of the schoolyard cockfight, so is he an outsider in the rough worker's barracks. In such recollections, Miller depicts himself as a youth of heightened sensibilities, an independent thinker, far from the clamour of the common crowd. Quoting Wordsworth and somewhat ostentatiously 'recollecting' the train of his private philosophical speculations, Miller is at pains to express his intellectual gifts despite his crude environment. His intention here is quite explicit as he advises Baird that Milton, Homer and Shakespeare had very different social standings 'but they have all risen to an equal height'.

Later in the account Miller records that his 'wit' soon endeared him to the other workers and thus he becomes a man both 'of' and 'above' the people. The series of social, political and cultural observations on the nature and status of the working classes, which runs throughout the account from this point forward, is intended to convey Miller's intellectual objectivity in regarding his working peers. Having

mediated his place as 'one of the people' (by way of his working status and relative acceptance in the mason's barracks) he now presents himself as a qualified voice-piece, a self-styled 'student of human nature', reflecting upon those stations of life and society in which he finds himself.

Miller had, in the final analysis, cast himself as the interior observer and interpreter of the working classes and traditional life. Baird's request for an account of Miller's education had resulted in a document of almost 150 pages in which Miller had more than fulfilled the Principal's original request. At the very outset of his career, Miller is pursuing his agenda in fashioning a life-story and literary identity which he could market to a literary audience. In this act of writing, Miller was literally 'authorising' his past and the process of his self-representation.

Nine years later, in 1838, Miller published his second autobiographical account as 'Hugh Miller, Author of the Traditionary History of Cromarty' in two articles for *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*. During the preceding decade he had introduced himself to the reading public as the Cromarty poet who had penned the descriptive *Letters on the Herring Fishing* and the reflective oral history of his native area in *Scenes and Legends*. 'Gropings of a Working Man Geologist'¹² was, nevertheless, Miller's first 'public' autobiography and offered the opportunity to delineate the terms of his public identity. Just as in the 1829 letter to Baird, Miller stresses his working credentials, representing his labouring life as a necessity rather than a choice. Describing his first working day as a mason he writes: 'The time I had so long dreaded had at last arrived and I felt that I was going down into a wilderness more desolate than that of Sinai, with little prospect of ever getting beyond it, and no hope of return'. ('Gropings of a Working-man Geologist', 247) Despite Miller's emphasis upon a life of

¹² Hugh Miller, 'Gropings of a Working Man Geologist,' *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, 28 April, 1838, pp. 109-10, and 26 May, 1838, pp. 137-9, reprinted in *Hugh Miller's Memoir* Appendix IV, pp. 246-257.

working drudgery, the account is scattered with literary references and scientific treatises from Ovid, Burns and Defoe to De Maillet's *Telliamed* and the works of James Hutton. Moreover, it is resplendent with the most self-consciously eloquent and descriptive passages:

There was not a wrinkle on the water nor a cloud in the sky, and the branches were as moveless in the calm as if they had been traced on canvas. From a wooded promontory that stretches half way across the firth, there ascended a thin column of smoke. It rose as straight as a line of plummet for more than a thousand yards, and then, on reaching a thinner stratum of air, spread out equally on every side like the foliage of a stately tree. Bean-Weavis [sic] rose to the west, white, with the yet unwashed snows of winter and sharply defined in the clear atmosphere, as if all its sunny slopes and blue retiring hollows had been chiselled in marble. A line of snow ran along the opposite hills; all above was white and all below was purple. ('Gropings of a Working-man Geologist', 248)

This is written some three years before *The Old Red Sandstone* would establish Miller's name in scientific literature. Yet, despite the ostensible geological subject matter of the *Chambers's* article, the account is shot through with autobiographical accounts and reflections that serve to foreground Miller's own life and experiences. A picture of Miller is first evoked in the opening paragraph as 'a wanderer among rocks and woods, a reader of curious little books, a gleaner of old traditionary tales'. ('Gropings of a Working-man Geologist', 246) Thus, Miller briefly sketches his primary credentials; rural, traditional and self-taught (as opposed to city-bred and scholarly) whilst at the same time emphasising the self-motivated pursuit of his scientific education:

My profession was a wandering one. I had been employed, for two seasons, amongst the basalts and coal-measures of the south of Scotland; I had wrought for three more in the primary districts of the remote Highlands; I had been an explorer of caves and ravines, a wanderer along sea-coasts, a climber among rocks, a labourer in quarries. ('Gropings of a Working-man Geologist', 251)

These accumulations of images show Miller layering a series of self-projections, one upon the other, to convey an image of himself which is impressionistic (even

chiaroscuro) in effect. Such passages are crucial to Miller's autobiographical agenda of self-fashioning. By this accretion of images, 'a wanderer among rocks and woods', 'a labourer in quarries', 'a reader of curious little books', Miller is creating the portrait of the rural working man on a personal voyage of discovery and self-education. He intimates the difficulties of this self-appointed task:

I was in the middle of the dreams [Creation] occasioned, when I stumbled by some rare chance on a number of the *Edinburgh Review*; I say rare chance, for seldom at this period did I meet with a book that had not been at least fifty years in print¹³ [...] It is always thus with the student who has to force a way for himself from the lower levels of intelligence. He finds more of a difficulty in the first few stages than in all the other stages that come after. ('Gropings of a Working-man Geologist', 253, 255)

But the overall tone of the articles is one of genuine enthusiasm for the pursuit of knowledge and encouragement to others to follow. The crafted descriptive passages, the copious literary references, the autobiographical self-fashioning, these all arise from the fact that in this account Miller is still in the process of shaping and articulating a literary voice. But the final words of the narrative introduce a further intention behind Miller's writing. In recording the experiences of his own self-education, Miller wished to offer himself as an exemplar to others like him who might find the same fascination and independence in pursuing interests outside the drudgery of their everyday labour:

My object at present is to show how possible it is to pursue very mean and laborious employments, and yet enjoy much happiness. My knowledge too had certainly increased in more than the ratio of former seasons; and as I had acquired the skill of at least the common mechanic, I had fitted myself for independence [...] It is surely by steps like these that the humble and toil-worn labourer is enabled to elevate himself in the scale of rational beings, and to derive positive mental enjoyment of an enduring kind from pursuits which in ordinary

¹³ The original text, as recorded in Shortland's publication, notes, 'We have here, unconsciously on the part of the writer, a most expressive proof of the rarity of copyright books among the common people. They can only afford the reprints of old books, and are thus apt to be at all times half a century behind the rest of the community in intelligence' (*Hugh Miller's Memoir*, 257, n.4.).

circumstances are only productive of pain, or viewed with apathetic indifference. ('Gropings of a Working-man Geologist', 251, 256)¹⁴

By Lejeune's terms, Miller's letter to Baird and 'Gropings of a Working-man Geologist' function as autobiographical narratives. In the first account, however, Miller's intention was merely to fashion a portrait of his history for a potential literary patron. In this respect, Miller fulfils Lejeune's criterion of describing 'the development of a personality' up until that point in his life. This aspect of the autobiography is, however, notably absent from the later account. Furthermore, the *Chambers's* article is not so much concerned with the 'retrospective' element of the narrative. As a public presentation, Miller is more concerned here with establishing his immediate characteristics. And while he sketches in a brief history of his early working life, one has the sense that his intention here is not so much to illustrate the *development* of a personality over time, as to establish a fixed, concrete and tangible identity that could function as a self-supporting working persona for his literary career. Probably for this same reason, the *Chambers's* article divulges much less personal reflection than the letter to Baird. In the earlier account, Miller describes his grief upon his father's death, his mother's reaction to the loss of her children and his sense of childhood isolation and frustration in early working life. Arguably, Miller's intention in the letter to Baird was to engage the empathy of his reader so as to attract patronage. In the later account to a public audience, however, Miller, while concerned to emphasise his early hardships, is interested in conveying his mastery over them and his successful establishment as a self-reliant, accomplished working man. If the 1828 autobiography fulfils Lejeune's generic criterion more fully, it is because Miller was still in the process of fashioning a literary identity via the retrospective narrative. By the time he came to write for

¹⁴ The first reference is to the closing words of the first article, the second to the final words of the article entire.

Chambers's Journal, some ten years later, Miller had conceived his role as 'exemplar' to the working man. From that time forward, Miller's autobiographic intention would shift from retrospective self-analysis to self-projection via the retrospective account.

History in the Mouth of the Lion

'Until the lions have their historians, tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter.'
African Proverb.

It was not until some sixteen years later that Miller produced his most definitive and acclaimed autobiographical work, *My Schools and Schoolmasters or The Story of My Education* in 1854. While contemporary theory is useful in defining the linguistic and ideological perimeters of the autobiographical genre, we must not lose sight of Miller's own conception of the autobiographical project. He explicitly outlined this in his note 'To The Reader' that prefaces *My Schools and Schoolmasters*. Here, Miller describes two functions of the autobiography. Firstly, and principally, was Miller's social conception of the genre. He was to offer his own life-story as 'a sort of educational treatise, thrown into narrative form, and addressed more specifically to working men'. (S&S, p.xiv) The function of this 'treatise' was to 'succeed in rousing the humbler classes to the important work of self-culture and self-government, and in convincing the higher that there are instances in which working men have at least as legitimate a claim to their respect as to their pity'. (S&S, p.xv) From these words it is clear that Miller intended to utilise the autobiography to consolidate his role as an 'exemplar' for working men, illustrating the benefits and rewards of a self-cultured and autonomous life. Furthermore, he was to act as a working-class representative to the middle and upper classes, repudiating fallacious prejudices regarding the ignorance and dependence of working people.

Miller did allow for a personal aspect in his conception of autobiography, although it appears that he regarded self-revelation as the inevitable by-product rather than the intention of the autobiographic narrative. In the note 'To The Reader' he concedes:

In a work cast in the autobiographic form, the writer always has much to apologize for. With himself for his subject, he usually tells not only more than he ought, but also, in not a few instances, more than he intends. For, as has been well remembered, whatever may be the character which a writer of his own Memoirs is desirous of assuming, he rarely fails to betray the real one. He has almost always his unintentional revelations, that exhibit peculiarities of which he is not conscious, and weaknesses which he has failed to recognise as such; and it will no doubt be seen that what is so generally done in works similar to mine, I have not escaped doing. (*S&S*, pp. xiv-xv)

Despite this attestation, critics have tended to complain of a lack of introspection in Miller's autobiography. James Robertson, in his 'Introduction' to the 1993 edition of *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, describes the autobiography as possessing an 'impersonal note' by its presentation 'largely as an account not of himself, but of his "schools and schoolmasters"'.¹⁵ More explicitly, David Robb comments upon the 1854 autobiography that:

With all its amplitude [*My Schools and Schoolmasters*] fails to inform us of basic facts of Miller's own life (such as the full extent of his immediate family) and, more important still, it is not really much preoccupied with Miller's inward life. It is not one of the great introspective autobiographies and can be downright unsatisfying at key points such as his decision to reject the path of formal education and instead to become a mason. Is Miller simply using his life-narrative as a peg upon which to hang his vast store of colourful anecdote? Has he misconceived his autobiography or is he deliberately concealing from us truths about himself? What is he setting out to do?¹⁶

While Robb recognises Miller's 'idiosyncratic conception of what an autobiography such as his should be and do' (i.e. perform a social, rather than introspective, function), there is an implied devaluation of this material conception in comparison with 'the

¹⁵ James Robertson, 'Introduction,' *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, (Edinburgh: B&W 1993), p.xi.

¹⁶ David Robb, 'Stand, and Unfold Yourself: *My Schools and Schoolmasters*', in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science* (see Shortland, above), pp. 246-7.

great introspective autobiographies' of the established literary canon. Regenia Gagnier has repudiated such readings as Robertson's and Robb's as symptomatic of the hegemony of 'bourgeois subjectivity', 'the dominant ideology of the nineteenth and at least the first half of the twentieth century'.¹⁷ Her (implicitly Marxist) interrogation of dominant critical readings identifies the prioritisation of introspective subjectivity as the inevitable outcome of Cartesian, post-Enlightened assumptions about the self and its politicisation in a society dominated by so-called liberal ideology. Cartesian dualism, which posited the inherent schism between mind and body, was embraced by the rationalist agenda of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment in order to privilege the mind *over* body – and that dialectic's whole set of composite values: thought above labour, introspection above public domain, the individual above the mass. Deriving from these values, the dominant ideology of liberal individualism (characterised in the nineteenth century by Locke's 'rational' self-interest), Gagnier argues, prioritised intellectual freedoms (freedom of speech, freedom to vote, right to dissent) above material freedoms (freedom from starvation, sickness, cold, homelessness). Thus, Gagnier pronounces, 'here is where the conception of human nature that [...] has been central to post-Enlightened aesthetics enters with its privileging of rationality, individualism, and autonomy from material circumstances',¹⁸ an autonomy predicated by the liberal assumption that each human being will be motivated by individual self-interest. The Cartesian self, underpinning both nineteenth-century political ideology and post-Enlightenment aesthetics, had thus led to the critical privileging of subjectivism. This implicit set of critical values resulted in the devaluation of autobiographical narratives written by those of 'marginal' status (such as women and the working classes), which embodied a different set of values and intentions than those

¹⁷ Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 39.

canonical texts promoted by the established liberal individualist reading. This acts as a powerful corrective to readings that assume a necessary subjective depth to the autobiography and which neglect the importance of the social and didactic function of polemical projects such as Millers.

The social historian David Vincent is one of the few emergent critics in contemporary analysis to offer an evaluation of the particular values and intentions of working-class autobiography within the context of its particular socio-cultural orientation.¹⁹ If Miller's *My Schools and Schoolmasters* is regarded properly as belonging to the generic category of working-class autobiography, then to this must be added the caveat that Miller's relation to neither the working nor the literary class was straightforward. Vincent has noted that Miller was one of the few working-class writers to have actually risen in social station, both through occupation and marriage. As we have seen, his access to the middle-class arena of letters allowed him to mediate a public voice which commanded literary authority whilst maintaining its address to the particular concerns of the working people. However, this composite social identity of 'working-class labourer' and 'established man of letters' was not without its tensions. Miller's *My Schools and Schoolmasters* is his first attempt to negotiate an explicit narrative of the self to the public from his position as both 'man of letters' and 'man of the people.' As a result, his autobiography manifests both the tropes of middle-class, 'literary' autobiography, with its emphasis upon introspective analysis and rational

¹⁸ Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities*, p.21.

¹⁹ See David Vincent, *Bread Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (Europa, London, 1981); *The Autobiography of The Working Classes: An Annotated, Critical Bibliography* eds., David Vincent, John Burnett and David Mayall (Brighton, Harvester Press, 1984); *Testimonies of Radicalism: Memoirs of Working-Class Politicians*, ed. by David Vincent (London: Europa, 1977). For related studies, see T. G. Ashplant, 'Anecdote as Narrative: Resource in Working-Class Life Stories: Parody, Dramatisation and Sequence' in *Narrative and Genre* eds., Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 99-133; *The French Worker: Autobiography from the Early Industrial Era*, ed. by Mark Traugott (Berkley, University of California Press, 1993) in which Traugott defines a series of specific working-class autobiographical sub-genres.

values, as well as several features of the working-class autobiography²⁰ including the adoption of the 'storytelling' persona as well as a broadly polemical (rather than subjective) focus. A tension arises in *My Schools and Schoolmasters* between Miller's desire to conform to the literary 'standard' of the introspective, rationalistic critique and his intention to adopt the traditional voice and values of the working community in expressing his didactic message of working-class self-culture.

Given Miller's intention to offer his life-story as an 'exemplar' for the working man, his autobiography is largely shaped by polemical, socio-political considerations. As David Vincent has noted, the nineteenth century saw a prolific output in working-class autobiography. Discussing the motivation behind this particular class interest in a specific genre, Vincent observes that many of the working class, as the free market reduced them to units of economic exchange and as the press increasingly reduced them to crude stereotype, seized the opportunity to recreate the fully dimensional wholeness of their lives in a 'self-authored' account. Furthermore, Vincent notes that as the oral voice, which had previously sustained the historic record of the traditional working experience, was being increasingly superseded by the authority of the written word, working men and women became aware of the necessity of *writing down* a permanent testimony of their particular experience.

Miller resented the obscurity of death as a final eclipse upon the lives of so many working people, whom he respected and admired, but who lived, just as they died, without voice or visibility. In *My Schools and Schoolmasters* he records that the life of his father had been passed to him through the oral traditions of his family history. As

²⁰ Gagnier has identified a variety of 'types' of working-class autobiography: the conversion narrative, the gallows narrative, the vestigial religious account, commemorative stories, the political/polemical account, the confessional, and the introspective narrative. This last is regarded by Gagnier as a working class approximation of the 'bourgeois subjectivity' of canonical middle-class autobiographies. The tropes of the middle-class autobiography Gagnier defines more loosely as: the presentation of a family lineage,

Vincent's study suggests, Miller perhaps hoped to maintain his father's posterity by endowing his life with the authority of the written word. Similarly, of his uncle James, Miller noted that 'the larger part died with him; but a portion of them I succeeded in preserving in a little traditionary work published a few years after his death'.²¹ (S&S, 35) His 1828 project of 'Things which I intend doing' (Appendix A) included, '4. I intend writing a memoir of my father's life', '5. I intend writing the life of my uncle, Alexander Wright', '8. I intend writing a memoir of my friend, Will Ross' and '9. I intend writing a memoir of my townsman, David Henderson'. If Miller never achieved these projects singularly, then he did at least fulfil his intention of raising their names from the grave of obscurity within the context of his own autobiographical narratives. His intention to write a memoir of William Ross is fulfilled in chapter eleven of *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, which concludes: 'but such hapless geniuses there are in every age in which art is cultivated and literature has its admirers, and strikingly honest and retiring in their natures, the world rarely finds them out in time.' (S&S, 212) In the same way, Miller's recollections of the Reverend Alexander Stewart reveal Miller's concern to document the value of the little-known man. Once more it is the written word that enshrines man's immortality:

Further, practising but little the art of composition, and master of a spoken style more effective for the purposes of the pulpit than almost any written one, save that of Chalmers, he failed, in all his attempts in writing, to satisfy a fastidious taste, which he had suffered greatly to outgrow his ability of production. And so he failed to leave any adequate mark behind him. (S&S, 394)

This failure to leave a testimony to one's own life is the final tragedy for Miller. ('How could such a man pass from the earth and leave no trace behind him?' (S&S, 393)) The

a focus on childhood experience and a description of intellectual growth and material progress within in account which embodies the values of rationality.

²¹ Miller is here referring to *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland or the Traditional History of Cromarty*.

thought is abhorrent to him. It was unjust enough that great men should be obscure in their lives, but worse still that in death they should cease to exist altogether, even in the records of men. Miller's testimony to these neglected and fleeting lives was to inscribe a testimony to their value in the concrete record of the authoritative written word.

Derrida's analysis of written versus speech acts in Rousseau's autobiography offers a useful connection here. Derrida noted that in Rousseau's account the act of writing takes the place of what Rousseau was unable to express in words.²² In this respect, it is notable that Miller was an unskilled speaker both in social and formal occasions. A delegated speaker often delivered his public lectures, while he remained in the audience.²³ Yet his writing has a remarkable oratorical quality. Indeed, the same is true of Carlyle, a fumbling public speaker; his written word has the vitality of the denunciatory pulpiteer. Without overstressing the point, it is worth speculating whether the authoritative voices in the autobiographies of *My Schools and Schoolmasters* and *Sartor Resartus* conferred a degree of validity upon these writers in their palpable search for authority, a confident articulation which the Scottish man of working roots could not find in his spoken voice.

For Miller, the written testimony of a working life, moreover, could offer a powerful ideological construct by representing an alternative experience to the one promoted by conventional, establishment society. In this way, the autobiographical genre had great subversive potential. Miller's *Witness* articles of the 1840s had advanced this interpretation of working-class autobiography:

What we chiefly desire in a gallery of Scottish autobiography that would introduce to us the labouring poor in their true colours, is vested in those thinking powers which they truly possess, not in the scanty modicum of intellect which mere *littérateurs*, with, mayhap, not very much themselves to spare, chose to

²² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1994).

²³ Peter Bayne, II, 335.

bestow upon them, is simply the story of a single life, representative of each class in the country – the production of some reflective mind, possessed by no egotistical over-estimation of its own powers and not unacquainted with the philosophy of its own course.²⁴

Miller's own autobiography was directed at the working classes with this specific intention. *My Schools and Schoolmasters* is intended then, not so much as a self-scrutinising account of Miller's own identity, but as the construction of an exemplary life of self-culture. In the same way that 'Gropings of a Working Man Geologist' might be seen to depart from a strict reading of Lejeune's 'retrospective account' of the 'development of a personality', so too we must regard *My Schools and Schoolmasters* as the self-conscious construction of a public persona via the autobiographical narrative.

Self-Fashioning the Public Man of Letters

In his analysis of the autobiographical genre Paul de Man observed that the autobiography tends to be more performative than cognitive. Its real intention is not to make sense of the self but to display the self.²⁵ While in Miller's *My Schools and Schoolmasters* there are elements of self-confession - the book is penitent about his wilful neglect of early educational opportunities in a way that his 1829 account is not²⁶ - Miller is also interested in the self-dramatisation of confession as part of his ongoing literary self-fashioning. In this later public statement of his life, Miller has adjusted his interpretation of his 'wasted' schooldays so as to warn others of the labouring classes

²⁴ Hugh Miller, 'The People: Their Own Best Portrait Painters' (*The Witness*, 5 December 1849).

²⁵ Paul De Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 286.

²⁶ In the account written to Baird, Miller construes his early mis-education more as the fault of inept schoolteachers than his own resistance and indifference. He observes of his grammar teacher that, 'had I been placed under his care five years sooner, he would have made me a scholar'. ('letter to Baird', 106) and of his expulsion: 'He showed a determination too, by the occasions he sought of quarrelling with me, to have me expelled the school [sic]'. ('letter to Baird', 109) In *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, however, Miller concedes that 'a right use of the opportunities of instruction afforded me in early youth would have made me a scholar ere my twenty-fifth year.' (S&S, 535)

against the futility of wasted educational opportunities. At the same time, the book is not an assertion of the importance of an establishment education so much as a defence of the self-governing, self-educated life. If Miller does suggest regret at his lack of scholarly attainments then he repeatedly emphasises the value of financial independence and personal autonomy guaranteed by a stable trade. ('But while my story must serve to show the evils which result from truant carelessness in boyhood [...] it may also serve to show that much may be done by after diligence to retrieve an early error of this kind'. (S&S, 535-6)) The point of Miller's early recollections is to emphasise that his present attainments rose neither from charity nor patronage but from hard work and self-motivation. When he comes to describe that decision to enter into masonry as a young man, though tinged with regret, strongest is the imperative to labour and self-reliance:

Noble, upright, self-relying Toil! Who that knows thy solid worth and value would be ashamed of thy hard hands and thy soiled vestments, and thy obscure tasks – thy humble cottage and hard couch and homely fare! Save for thee and thy lessons, man in society would everywhere sink into a sad compound of the fiend and the wild beast; and this fallen world would be as certainly a moral as a natural wilderness. (S&S, 147)

The Carlylean rhetoric here is perhaps deliberate as Miller invokes the great sage in his imperative to Work, emphasising the dignity of the independent man who toils for his own attainments.

If *My Schools and Schoolmasters* manifests several of the polemical features of the classic working-class autobiography, then it also reveals significant concessions to the model of middle-class canonical autobiography. In the *Quarterly Review* of December 1826, James Gibson Lockhart wrote the first article to recognise publicly the emergence of working-class autobiographies upon the literary scene. His words were

condescending about what he considered to be the vulgarisation of Rousseau's high art form, and he dismissed the working-class autobiography as a corruption of the genre:

The classics of the *papiermache* age of our drama have taken up the salutary belief that England expects every driveller to do his Memorabilia. Modern primer-makers must needs leave *confessions* behind them, as if they were so many Rousseaus. Our weakest mob orators think it a hard case that they cannot speak to posterity. Cabin boys and drummers are busy with their commentaries *de Bello Gallico*; the John Gilpins of "the nineteenth century" are the historians of their own *anabases*, and thanks to "that march of intellect" we are already rich in the autobiography of pickpockets.²⁷

For a writer such as Miller, aspiring to the literary authority of the established classes, such damning critical responses to the working-class narrative must certainly have made him sensitive to the critical requirements of the age. In citing Rousseau, Lockhart is signalling the critical assent to the introspective, individualist values of the post-Enlightened age. Once more the critical language of the *literati* undermines the working man's literary aspirations by citing his common denominator as trade. Lockhart's working-class autobiographies are written by 'mob orators,' 'cabin boys,' 'pickpockets.' The implication is that the labouring man is associated with facile political agitation and petty crime and not with the introspective, analytical intelligence of a writer such as Rousseau.²⁸ In her assessment of working-class autobiography, Gagnier has noted that certain working-class writers adapted to the critical values promulgated by the *literati* in order to achieve more widespread critical endorsement:

In such texts one reads the cost of bourgeois [...] ideology to men and women who were not permitted bourgeois lives [...] these [texts] extensively adopted middle-class ideology: they have understood the value of introspection and writing as tools of self-understanding; they seek to write their lives as middle-

²⁷ *Quarterly Review* Vol. XXXV, 28 December 1826, p. 149 unsigned article written by John Gibson Lockhart, the editor, quoted in David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, p. 28.

²⁸ Notably, it was Lockhart who in *Blackwood's Magazine* had described Leigh Hunt as the 'meanest, filthiest, and the most vulgar of Cockney poetasters' and who condemned the poetry of the young John Keats, his review closing with the famous taunt, 'back to the shop Mr John, back to "plasters, pills and ointment boxes"'. (*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, August 1818).

class narratives, especially with respect to the development of parent-child relationships and material progress: and they believe that writing and self-understanding will help them succeed.²⁹

Miller too can be seen to be adapting to 'literary' expectations of the autobiography; firstly, in his extensive focus upon childhood experience, typical of the canonical autobiography, and secondly, in his appeal to rational, post-Enlightened values.

Where most working-class autobiographies deal lightly with the subject of childhood (usually because it was traumatic or foreshortened by the necessity to work) Miller devotes several chapters to reflections upon his childhood, more than he expends on the subsequent discussion of his literary, ecclesiastic or scientific career. The concentration on childhood experiences is part of the subjective agenda of the middle-class narrative, exploring the development of an autonomous identity and its shaping factors. While it is relevant that Miller avoided the necessity of labouring life until he was eighteen, and thus experienced a longer childhood than most working-class children, this may also be one of the ways in which Miller self-consciously conformed to the established autobiographical canon. The early chapters of the novel are certainly the most intimate in the book, relating Miller's grief upon his father's death, his subsequent rebelliousness and thereafter his solitudinous self-education prior to his reluctant engagement in a labouring profession. It is with a sense of real regret that Miller abandons his youthful adventures and passes into working life:

Finlay was away; my friend of the Doocot cave was away; my other companions were all scattered abroad; my mother, after a long widowhood of more than eleven years, had entered into a second marriage; and I found myself standing face to face with a life of labour and restraint. (S&S, 144)

²⁹ Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities*, p. 45.

The loss of childhood friends is connected here with the loss of the maternal home, and, by implication, the domestic scene of childhood. It is as if childhood has abandoned Miller, leaving him with nothing but the melancholy necessity of an adult, working life. At this juncture in the narrative, the reader is increasingly drawn away from reflections upon Miller's working life (typical of the working-class autobiography) and towards the exposition of Miller's inner, intellectual life.

Most adaptive to the middle-class narrative, however, is Miller's attempt to align himself towards the rationalistic ideal and away from traditional models of preternatural, 'irrational' belief.³⁰ The most striking examples of the tension between inherited forms of folkloric belief and educated rationalism occur in the book's opening chapters. Miller begins his narrative by reference to the tales of his ancestors, tales often characterised by strange, supernatural portent and visions, such as those of his father, of which he avows, 'the details of the misadventure which stripped the shipmaster of the earnings of long years of carefulness and toil, blended as they are with what an old critic might term a curious machinery of the supernatural, seem not unworthy of being unabridged'. (S&S, 11) Miller was clearly not only fascinated by these stories but also proud enough of them to foreground them at the opening of his autobiography. However, as the narrative approaches his own life story, Miller becomes increasingly reticent about the value of such beliefs. To quote again from Miller's recollections of his father's death:

I saw at the open door, within less than a yard of my breast, as plainly as ever I saw anything, a dissevered hand and arm stretched towards me. Hand and arm

³⁰ To this must be added the important caveat that Miller's own scientific rationalism increasingly called into question the tenets of traditional belief in which he had been raised. What is interesting, in terms of the autobiography, is the way in which Miller's movement in to the middle-class arenas of literature and scientific professionalism produce a marked ambivalence in his treatment of supernatural subjects. As the accounts by Robert Dick and David Masson (Chapter 6) as well as Marion Wood (below) suggest, Miller retained a degree of private belief in the workings of the supernatural but which he strove to refute publicly when delivering his literary and scientific persona to an educated readership.

were apparently those of a female: they bore a living and sodden appearance; and directly fronting me, where the body ought to have been, there was only blank, transparent space, through which I could see the dim forms of objects beyond. I communicate the story, as it lies fixed in my memory, without attempting to explain it. The supposed apparition may have been merely an affectation of the eye, of the nature described by Sir Walter Scott in his 'Demonology', and Sir David Brewster in his 'Natural Magic.' But if so, the affectation was one of which I experienced no after return and its coincidence with the probable time of my father's death seems at least curious. (S&S, 23-24)

As we have seen in his negotiations of the supernatural in chapters three and five, Miller's language is always ambivalent in responding to the claims of the immaterial world. In a manner typical of the writing of the most creative Scots of the period; Burns, Hogg, even Scott, the impression of preternatural appearances is pitted against the concrete, scientific terminology of the Enlightenment.³¹ Nevertheless, one of the most striking impressions of Miller's *My Schools and Schoolmasters* is that of a childhood steeped in traditional lore and supernatural portent. Much like his *Scenes and Legends* of 1835, the autobiography offers a multitude of folkloric anecdotes, strange tales and encounters with rural gypsies and madwomen. It is this very integration of Miller's concrete social and cultural analysis combined with the ancient and ethereal lore of an older Scotland that makes *My Schools and Schoolmasters* so distinctive. The autobiography is repeatedly drawn to the subject of death, haunting and the immaterial world. A family friend of the Millers, a Mrs Marion Wood, recalled of Miller's storytelling abilities:

I have never heard such stories so told [...] he seemed to see the scenes he described, and compelled one to see them too. It was evident he had been nurtured in the belief of these superstitions, and that in early life they must have had complete sway over his mind, - a sway that might be resumed in hours of weakness. Then, however, he disclaimed all belief in them; and in the

³¹ Notably, Burns and Hogg were autodidacts like Miller and had been raised in communities with strong oral folkloric traditions. Even Scott first realised his love of folklore in the traditional, local community at Sandyknowe in the Borders. These traditional influences were to come into conflict with the writers' exposure to the rationalistic trends promulgated in the cosmopolitan capital.

conversation which preceded the stories had made some forcible remarks on the frequent combination in the same person of scepticism and credulity.³²

Vincent recognises such a tension as a recurrent feature of the autodidactic experience: 'it is impossible for the working man to describe his youth without reference to the bewildering (or fascinating) array of superstitious beliefs'. Yet, despite their fascination with the beliefs in which they had been raised, working writers were simultaneously 'distanced from this pattern of beliefs and customs because they themselves were the product of the erosion of the oral tradition which had sustained it'.³³ In other words, the autodidact recognised that his own self-education, his analysis of traditional community and his record of oral folklore were in themselves symptomatic of the gradual disintegration of traditional, rural community in the face of an intellectual culture which privileged rational, sceptical analysis. 'Reason', as David Vincent puts it, 'rather than religion was the enemy of magic.'³⁴ For some, this could ensure the liberation from restrictive credulous modes of thinking. But for many it produced a psychological antagonism as they attempted to impose the educated, individualistic values of a rational and material belief structure upon the fluid, communal, intuitive relationship to the world in which they had been raised. Discussing the potential ramifications of such a project, Gagnier has suggested that this clashing of cultural perspectives, traditional and intellectual, could ultimately result in narrative and psychological breakdown:

Although [working-class writers] attempt self-analysis [...] their experience cannot be analyzed in the terms of their acculturation. This gap between ideology and experience leads not only to the disintegration of the narrative the writer hopes to construct, but [...] to the disintegration of the personality itself.³⁵

³² Marion Wood, 'Recollections of a Lady' quoted in Elizabeth Sutherland, *Lydia, Wife of Hugh Miller of Cromarty* (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2002), pp. 68-9.

³³ David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, pp. 167, 168.

³⁴ David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, p. 168.

³⁵ Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities*, pp. 43-4.

Gagnier's particular study focuses upon dominant gender ideologies. However, in the light of Vincent's comments about intellectual acculturation, it is tempting to relate the recurrent ideological ambivalence, and even narrative reticence ('I communicate the story [...] without attempting to explain it'), in *My Schools and Schoolmasters* to the eerie tone of Miller's suicide note. Indeed, Vincent himself, in an article on *Schools and Schoolmasters*, has posited the theory that Miller's supernaturally tainted suicide note may express the rebellion of a repressed belief system at a time of physical vulnerability:

The suicide note, with its reference to a terrible dream, indicated that the supernatural beliefs that he had imbibed from his mother had broken loose from the rational bonds that he tied around them in his pursuit of knowledge. His imagination had later been pressed into the service of his science, but had remained a profoundly disruptive force in his intellectual enterprise.³⁶

In his project to mediate between the polarised cultures of labour and literature, Miller was compelled to forge a literary voice that could both speak to the working community whilst retaining literary authority. Critiques such as Lockhart's illustrate the unforgiving critical climate in which Miller, as a literary working man, was placed. Yet authority was crucial to the success of Miller's self-fashioned 'exemplar'. From a Lacanian perspective, if the self can only be perceived via the 'Other,' then autobiography seeks to control that Lacanian gaze. By author-izing the presentation of the self, the writer seeks to control both language and the exterior perception it creates. And not only this, the Lacanian gaze is a crucial means of validating the self. So alarmed was Miller by the notion of obscurity, not only in a personal sense but as a social neglect, that we may view the process of his writing corpus as a search for authorial visibility and author-ity from where he will further disclose the neglected

³⁶ David Vincent, 'Miller's Improvement: a classic tale of self-advancement?' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above), pp. 230-246 (p. 241).

voices and stories of so many others. The very title of Miller's autobiography points the reader away from Miller himself to the ironic depiction of his education at the hands of 'life' and the 'uneducated.' By making working people and their experiences visible, Miller seeks in turn to validate them. The same might be said of his own personal autobiographical intentions. By continually relating his own life story, Miller retained a crucial control over his own self-presentation. Having attained literary authority through the establishment of a critically acceptable position, Miller would be further enabled to exploit that authority to the advantage of the working community which he sought to represent.

If Miller's seminal purpose in *My Schools and Schoolmasters* was to fashion an exemplary literary persona for the working classes in a narrative which borrowed from the authority of established values, then the 1854 autobiography also provided a secondary function for Hugh Miller. As David Robb has stated, the autobiographical narrative allowed Miller to present a coherent response to his most vociferous detractors. Robb's essay offers a contextualising reference to the political atmosphere from which *My Schools and Schoolmasters* arose, suggesting that the autobiography may be, in part, a response to Thomas Mulock's public challenge to Miller regarding Miller's recent criticisms of Candlish and the Free Church's educational policy.³⁷ The partially defensive intention behind *My Schools and*

³⁷ In his article, 'Stand and Unfold Yourself: My Schools and Schoolmasters', David Robb cites an article in the *Inverness Advertiser*, in which Mulock addressed Miller directly: 'We would ask whether another 'particular bright star' - Mr Hugh Miller - was obscured by his inchoate instruction received at the Cromarty school? [...] We grant that he has done much for himself; but we still contend that the Cromarty school and schoolmaster rendered him some service which his ungrateful pen [...] does not adequately acknowledge [...] We say to these stern maligners of the education of their native land - 'Stand and unfold yourself!' Where was the foundation laid of your own brilliant attainments? Did no Scottish school receive you?; no Scottish dominie instruct you?; no Scottish *palmies* correct you? If not, then we affirm you to be aliens in our own country, and strangers to the system which you disparage and revile'. (*Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above), pp. 250-251)

Miller disagreed with Robert Candlish, then leader of the Free Church, that educational policy should run along denominational lines, believing that it should be free from all politics and ecclesiastic interests. The article by Mulock, (a staunch supporter of Candlish), charges Miller with hypocrisy, claiming that Miller's own intellectual abilities must testify, at least in part, to the success of the current

Schoolmasters probably extended beyond this local encounter. Miller, as we have seen, had made many enemies in his professional career and he was no doubt aware of the suspicion with which he was regarded in the established circles of Edinburgh. By the time that Miller came to write the autobiography, beginning in 1853, he had been all but critically ignored by the *literati* and rejected by the Scottish Free Church. Miller's desire to write a fully autobiographical account of his life may therefore have been partly motivated by a desire to reveal the conditions in which he lived and worked and to explain his own ideological position in order to counteract his public reputation as a combative, and often hostile, figure. The few contemporary accounts that remain of Miller tend to depict a somewhat contradictory and equivocal figure, as if Miller was an anomaly even to his own peers.³⁸ This, his final autobiographical account, may also have been an attempt to deliver a conclusive, self-defined corrective to the many misunderstandings that had beset him in his public life.

Self-Fashioning and the Fiction of Identity

Miller's adoption of the autobiographical narrative as a trajectory that unifies all his generic voices, must also point to a deeper psychological, and personal purpose.

According to Paul de Man, all autobiography is a form of epitaph, 'the survival of

Scottish parish education system. Thus, the story of Miller's education, *outwith* the influences of the Scottish school and schoolmaster may, in fact, have been prompted as a response to Mulock's challenge. Miller intended his autobiography to reveal that his attainments were his own and that he was beholden to no establishment institutions for the cultivation of his own attainments. The 'foundation of his brilliant attainments' he had achieved as the result of a life of independent labour and at the hands of a series of mostly uneducated, rural, working people. His own life was not to lay testimony to an education system so plainly in need of reform

³⁸ David Masson writes of Miller's Free Church colleagues: 'But though they could trust him and admired him, they could never manage, nor adequately comprehend him'. (p. 151) J. R. Robertson, who wrote a recollection of Miller for Bayne's biography conceded that 'I cannot pretend to have fathomed and mapped out Hugh Miller's character [...] but I can recollect my sentiments towards him then' and admitted that he at first saw Miller as 'harsh and even fierce and dangerous' (Bayne, I, 387). James McCosh and Marion Wood have noted Miller's social reticence while the Reverend Stewart is quoted by Harriet Taylor as having said of Miller, 'I never fully understood Hugh until he wrote that letter to Lord Brougham. I never could get him to talk much to me.' ('My Recollections of Hugh Miller by Harriet M. Taylor,' Appendix to Elizabeth Sutherland, *Lydia, Wife of Hugh Miller of Cromarty*, pp. 163 – 173, (p.170)).

writing beyond the grave, in which death, by writing, is both anticipated and repressed',³⁹ 'anticipated' in the sense that the writer, conscious of his mortality, prepares his final testimony, and 'repressed' in that the immortality of language seeks to transcend death itself. As we have seen, the awareness of death possessed a particular significance for Miller. The mythology of the absent father is arguably Miller's way of redressing his father's literal absence by making him 'present' in writing. Indeed, the theme of death as a motivating 'presence' within the text, and by implication, within life, recalls Freud's account of the death-instinct as an attempt by the psyche to restore an earlier state of things.⁴⁰ In the same way, Barthes's suggestion that the past is merely a nostalgic site of existential unity implies that the autobiographical agenda seeks to 'reconstruct' a fiction of the self from the monument of the past.⁴¹ The disproportionate emphasis on childhood experience in autobiography⁴² relates to the writer's search to find an essentialist 'age of innocence,' a kind of inherent self against which all other, later experiences can be defined. A notable example of this is Edwin Muir's *Autobiography* (1954), in which Muir's childhood in Orkney is depicted as a kind of existential state of grace from which he gradually departed both by the corrupting advance of years and a literal separation in the city which came to symbolise, for Muir, the atomisation and alienation of the industrial age. Miller's account is not quite so literal in its symbolic conception. Yet there is a sense, indeed, in which Miller was

³⁹ Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* New Critical Idiom Series (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1998), p. 56.

⁴⁰ In Freud's seminal essay, *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917) he posited the theory of the death-instinct, describing a grief process whereby the ego actually desires death by identifying with the lost object, and then incorporating the lost object within itself, hence the desire for 're-union' in death. Death, furthermore, is associated with Freud's 'pleasure principle' (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920)) by virtue of the fact that the grieving ego views death as a kind of nostalgia and as a transference from the active grief process to a listless state of inertia. Alvarez, in his discussion of Freud in *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1972), notes that a remarkable number of literary figures who committed suicide had lost parents at a young age.

⁴¹ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes* trans. by Richard Howard, (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 60.

⁴² See R. N Coe, *When The Grass Was Taller: Autobiography and the Experience of Childhood* (London: Yale University Press, 1984) and John Hodgson, *The Search for the Self: Childhood in Autobiography and Fiction Since 1940* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

constructing a portrait of the past, throughout his work, defined by the values of traditional community, a fertile historic culture, and rural landscape, a 'monument of the past' by which he hoped to confront the social division, cultural degradation and industrialisation of Scotland's changing society.

In the note 'To The Reader,' Miller explained that his life story would converge with a depiction of the Scotland in which he had been raised.

Should [the autobiography] be found to possess an interest to any other class, it will be an interest chiefly derivable from the glimpses which it furnishes of the inner life of the Scottish people and its bearing on what has been somewhat clumsily termed 'the condition of the country question.' (S&S, p.xiv)

The nostalgia that runs through *My Schools and Schoolmasters* may in fact be the nostalgia of a man in exile from his childhood. There is certainly the sense in the autobiography that Miller's childhood expressed a 'natural self' that was somehow constrained by his life as a working man and public figure. In contrast to the isolated intellectual of the mason's barracks and the bellicose critic of *The Witness* newspaper, Miller's childhood ramblings, as leader of his gang of boys, depicts a more confident and carefree Miller than we are ever to see in the subsequent chapters. In fact, the depiction of the values of a traditional Scotland, an older, rural Scotland from which he had risen, was probably intended to augment Miller's own self-valuation as a working, rural man preaching a lesson of genuine worth and integrity. David Robb has identified this tendency in *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, writing that 'Miller's depiction of the northern region of Scotland and its way of life inevitably reflects back on himself and functions as a means of self-definition.'⁴³ Miller is constructing a self very much identified with the older, traditional Scotland, one which he crucially identified with his own ancestry. *My Schools and Schoolmasters* is abundant in ancestral tales such as

those of old John Feddes, the buccaneer, the heroic, mystic Covenanter, Donald Roy and in the folk tales received from his mother and uncle Sandy as well as the recollections of his maternal grandfather. If *My Schools and Schoolmasters* inscribes an epitaph, then surely it is also as much an elegy to the line of past names and stories with which Miller anticipated joining his own. The act of writing forms an attempt to enshrine both their and his future immortality. The death instinct partook, in Miller, of the spectral, ethereal world of that bygone age and its ancestral heroes. For a religious man such as Miller, steeped in the otherworldliness of the holy and ancient spirits, death (the sea-grave of his own father) must have invited a desire for the immortal state after death, when he would return both to the father-in-flesh and the Father-in-spirit. Perhaps then, Miller's final autobiographical act was the laying down of that epitaph before he finally submitted to the nostalgia for the time of his forefathers that had long passed away, in an act of suicide that submitted to the call of that spectral childhood world.

My Schools and Schoolmasters is judged unfairly if it is judged only by the received critical bias for introspective subjectivism inherited from the Enlightenment. The polemical and narrative bias of Miller's autobiography derives from the fact that *My Schools and Schoolmasters* had an explicitly didactic agenda of its own. Moreover, its particular 'subjectivity' is concerned with 'the inner life of the Scottish people.' This had long been Miller's corollary to so-called objective historical narratives. The subjectivity of oral history was a political matter for Miller. Just as his *Scenes and Legends* offered a radical re-telling of Scottish history through anecdote, folklore and oral history so too does *My Schools and Schoolmasters* inscribe a testimony to the stories of countless other working-class men and women. Miller's life story is also the

⁴³ David Robb, 'Stand and Unfold Yourself: My Schools and Schoolmasters' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science* (see Shortland, above), p. 259.

record of the stories of working people, gypsies, sailors and society's outcasts, as well as of the landscape, culture and beliefs of the Scotland in which he was raised. In this, Miller was able, to a certain extent, to challenge the establishment values of post-Enlightenment rationality and industrial progress by citing the wisdom of the past and the communal values of traditional and rural society. Yet Miller was also aware that the literary authority of his writing must derive from a concession to the values of the middle-class *literati*. The tension between Miller's desire to celebrate the traditional, folkloric culture in which he had been raised and his reticence in attributing belief in it derives from his awareness of the debasement to which his writing could fall if it was perceived as credulously superstitious. Instead, Miller fashioned a composite persona from his autobiography, one that was both able to speak as a self-educated working man to the labouring community at which *My Schools and Schoolmasters* was primarily directed but which also borrowed from introspective personal and retrospective antiquarian narratives which appealed to the upper and middle classes, so long as they were restrained by a tone of detached rational observation.

Miller's writing between 1829 and 1856 extends across a diverse subject matter and an eclectic range of idioms and styles. By 1840, however, upon his ascension to literary authority, as editor of *The Witness*, Miller had achieved a voice of considerable rhetorical skill and polemical force. As Michael Shortland writes:

The links between Miller's mature Victorian journalism and his youthful Augustan period, writing under the spell of Goldsmith, Mackenzie and Pope, appear tenuous. In the early to mid 1820s, Miller was still experimenting, echoing the works of others; by the mid 1830s he had found his own voice.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Michael Shortland, 'Miller's Contribution to The Witness 1840 – 1856', in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science* (see Shortland, above), p. 288-9.

Throughout his writing Miller's is a voice vindicated by his own experience in the subjects of traditional culture and working life, upon which he wrote. Once established within the world of letters, Miller maintained his characteristic address as 'one of the people'. Not only was this an aspect of his literary persona but also formed, as we shall see in Part III, a crucial aspect of Miller's socio-literary vision.

Part Three: Miller's Socio-Literary Vision

‘It is the nature of literature, so rich in the human sympathies, so charged with the thoughts, the imaginings, the hopes, the wishes, which is the constitution of humanity to conceive and entertain, - it is of their nature to make us feel that the nations are all of one blood, - that man is our brother, and the world our country.’

Hugh Miller, ‘The Unity of the Human Races’

Part III: Miller's Socio-Literary Vision

In this final section of the thesis I consider Miller's personal socio-literary agenda as well as his wider social thinking. Chapter 10 considers Miller's conception of the role of literature and his arguments for literary self-cultivation and writing as a means to greater social inclusiveness. Chapter 11 explores Miller's social philosophy; his rejection of Humean scepticism and his possible debt to the thinking of the common sense philosophers. As such, Miller can be regarded as articulating a Moderate intellectual inheritance alongside his commitment to Evangelical ideas. However, the potential confrontations of these aspects in Miller's approach were to become increasingly apparent in the growing religious partisanship manifest in Scotland after 1843 and compounded by the death of Chalmers in 1847, when Miller found himself isolated by the new leadership of the Free Church.

Chapter Ten:

The People Are Their Own Best Portrait Painters

The Working-Class Voice in Literature

As we have seen autobiographical impulse was not a purely subjective notion for Hugh Miller. He viewed the record of a working life as a testimony of veracity to stand against the variety of misconceptions about working men manifested in popular writers of the day such as Bulwer Lytton, Wilkie Collins, John Wilson and D. M. Moir. Miller's earliest writing had demonstrated awareness, and worked towards the promotion, of the working-class voice. His *Scenes and Legends*, with its collection of popular tales and beliefs and its record of the personal and community experience of Scotland's past, expressed a desire to rewrite history from the oral voice of rural working people. Such invocation of self-taught writers can be traced throughout Miller's writing. By 1854, when Miller published his final statement regarding working-class education in *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, a corpus of humble-born authors and autodidacts had become, in Miller's conception, a tentative working-class canon. With some bias towards his own status as an outdoor labourer, Miller reflects in *My Schools and Schoolmasters* on the relative literary achievements of the different classes of working man:

And it will be found that the humbler of the two classes is much more largely represented in our literature than the class one degree less humble [sic]. Ranged against the poor clerk of Nottingham, Henry Clark White, and the still more hapless Edinburgh engrossing clerk, Robert Ferguson [sic], with a very few others, we find in our literature a numerous and vigorous phalanx, composed of men such as the Ayrshire Ploughman, the Ettrick Shepherd, the Fifeshire Foresters, the sailors Dampier and Falconer, Bunyan, Bloomfield, Ramsay, Tannahill, Alexander Wilson, John Clare, Allan Cunningham and Ebenezer Elliot. (S&S, 490)¹

¹ Other instances of this listing of a 'school' of working-class writers occur throughout Miller's work: S&S, 179; FI, 271; 'Literature of the People' (*The Witness*, October 27, 1849); 'Our Untaught Poets' (*The Witness*, 4 December 1852).

The superficial distinctions of labouring status are unimportant. What is significant here is the particular conception of a body of working-class writers. By the time Miller came to write *My Schools and Schoolmasters* in 1854, his public role as 'man of the people' had taken a distinctly literary focus. The advocacy of the working and traditional experience had evolved into the defence and patronage of the working-class voice in general. Just as Robert Chambers had utilised his publishing status to the benefit of unknown working writers,² Miller too used his literary status to promote the working-class voice. Several of Miller's *Witness* articles make reference to little-known writers (such as Gerald Massey³, Alexander Maclagan⁴ and John Kitto⁵) and autobiographers (such as Alexander Somerville and Annie McDonald, mother of the working-class writers, James and Alexander Bethune) born from humble beginnings.⁶ In an article of 1843, Miller penned a favourable review on the work of William Thom, a writer he consistently championed as an exemplar of working-class assiduity. Thom responded to Miller in correspondence, thanking him for his public notice and politely

² In the *Memoir of Robert Chambers with Autobiographic References of William Chambers* (Edinburgh: W&R Chambers, 1872) William Chambers recalls the publishing house's friendly correspondence and relations with Allan Cunningham, Leigh Hunt, James Hogg and Hugh Miller. Initially inspired to print Chapbooks for the Cheap Literature Movement of 1832, the publishers soon came to establish themselves as the leaders of the publishing market for a working-class readership and patron to several artisan writers.

³ Gerald Massey (1828 – 1907) Born in Hertfordshire, Massey was a child labourer in a silk factory and self-taught. In adult life he became involved in the Christian Socialist Movement and was editor of the spiritualist journal *Spirit of Freedom*. He published several volumes of poems, which were collected into a two-volume edition in 1889 entitled *My Lyrical Life*.

⁴ Alexander Maclagan (1818 - 1896) a little-known Scottish self-taught poet, he published two collections of verse, *Sketches from Nature, and other Poems* (1851) and *Ragged and Industrial School Rhymes* (1854).

⁵ Dr John Kitto (D.D., F. S.A.) (1804 – 1854) Born in humble circumstances in Plymouth, England, Kitto was largely self-taught before being apprenticed as an operative mason. During the 1820s his work as a printer to the Church mission Society took him to Malta, Russia, Turkey and Egypt and he became adept at several foreign languages. Upon his return to England in 1833 and in conjunction with the well-known publisher of cheap serials, Charles Knight, Kitto assisted in compiling titles such as the *Penny Magazine* and *Penny Cyclopaedia*. From then on he dedicated himself to literary labours, producing some undistinguished verse and several well-received Biblical works, for which he was bestowed the distinction of Doctor of Divinity and Fellow of the Society of Antiquities.

⁶ Hugh Miller, 'The Poesy of Intellect and Fancy' (*The Witness*, 20 December 1856); 'The Untaught Poets' (*The Witness*, 4 December 1852); 'A Strange Story, But True' (*The Witness*, 30 May 1856); 'Annie McDonald and the Fifeshire Forester' (*The Witness*, 10 August 1842).

requesting that Miller act as patron in giving his name to and recommending Thom's further publication:

Accept my very sincere thanks for your lively and kind notice of me and mine in your widely-spread Journal. True enough, it is a significant way of requiting such favours by dragging your care and kindness into fresh work; but, believing that you *will* as well as *word* my prosperity [sic], I take leave to hand my Prospectus, in the hope that, should you meet a friendly name, you will make my list all *that* the longer [sic]. My book will be a little book, which is sometimes a *great* mercy; but however lowly its claims in other respects, I assure you no page shall bear aught to disparage its patrons or me.⁷

A similar gesture of gratitude appears in the words of the philosopher James McCosh, who, in his 'Recollections' of Miller, included in Bayne's biography, noted that Miller was the first to publicly acknowledge his work and raise his name from obscurity.

I was not known at the time beyond a limited district in the north of Forfarshire, and the south of Kincardineshire; I believe neither of the eminent men referred to had ever heard of me before [...] but I did feel most [gratitude] to the great Scottish metaphysician [Sir William Hamilton]: and with him, and above him, to the man who spoke first, to Hugh Miller.⁸

Miller's promotion of the neglected and obscure was not merely sentimental, deriving from his own experiences as a working writer. Rather, his defence of the working-class voice, like Dickens's, possessed a distinctly ideological, and even political, objective. In 1849 Miller produced two notable *Witness* articles on the subject of working-class writing. Firstly, in 'Literature of the People' he remonstrated with the conventional literature of the day, arguing that its portrayal of working people was facile, false and misleading. Surveying the fashion for tales of the 'working classes' in contemporary writing, Miller warned that trite depictions and opportunist commercial marketing should not repay the curiosity that currently existed amongst the literate classes:

⁷ William Thom, letter to Hugh Miller, quoted in Bayne, II, 396 (4 March 1844).

⁸ 'Dr McCosh's Recollections' in Bayne, II, 450.

An overcharged satiety takes the place of the previously existing interest. It is of importance therefore, - for there are already many spurious articles in the field, - that the still unblunted [sic] appetite should be ministered to, not by the spurious but by the real, and that only the true condition and character of those classes which must always comprise the great bulk of mankind should be exhibited to the classes on a higher level than themselves, on whose exertions on their behalf so very much must depend. Nor would the advantage be all on one side: both the high and the low would greatly benefit for knowing each other. It would tend to contract and narrow the perilous gulf which yawns, in this and in all the other countries of Europe, between the poor and the wealthy, were it mutually *felt*, not merely coldly acknowledged, that God has made them all of one blood, and given them the same sympathies and faculties, and that the things in which they differ are mere superficial circumstances - the effect of accident of position.⁹

Literature, for Miller, was a means of heightening human empathy and he saw no better means to bridge the class divide than by the reading of one another's stories. He quoted the Inverurie autodidact, William Thom: "Man, know thyself" should be written on the right hand and on the left, "Men, know each other." Only the subjective telling of the intimate and individual experiences of working life could penetrate the blanket of society's ignorance regarding the experiences of the undifferentiated 'mass'. Tracing the history of popular representation in British literature, Miller's essay criticises the 'fickle, unthinking and ludicrously absurd' depiction of humble characters in Shakespeare's work and he observes that the shepherds of the Pastoral were a 'mere fiction of the poets'.

All this reveals something about Miller's own conception of fiction. In 'Our Novel Literature', he compared the ascendancy of the novel in the nineteenth century with the great philosophical treatises of the eighteenth. Miller was very much the Augustan in his belief in the moral and social function of art. His critique of the nineteenth-century novel assessed fiction in terms of its moral and edifying value. As Miller's early letters show, Miller also possessed an Evangelical distrust of art for art's

⁹ Hugh Miller, 'Literature of the People' (*The Witness*, 27 October 1849).

sake. His own poetry was characterised by its appeal to the Divine Creator and his experimentations with fiction are ambivalent in their claim to authorial status.¹⁰ For Miller, the 'mere fiction of the poets' could be measured against the absolute truth of God. In this way, he resists the pre-modern Romantic notion of moral relativity and the subjective imagination. Art possessed a moral function; its duty was to tell 'the truth.' Rather than fallacious fiction, in this case, his essentialist belief in the veracity of the autobiography was to represent the 'truth' of the working-class experience. Rather than mere escapism, literature possessed a moral responsibility to represent social and political realities. In 'Literature of the People' he is damning of the literary convention which dressed up and disguised reality in a costume of lies:

Like the silver mask of the veiled prophet that gleamed far amid the darkness of the night, and yet covered a countenance too horrible to be bared to the eye, it formed in the ancient literature the mask that at once concealed and represented the face of the people, - a face scarred and deformed by a cruel system of domestic slavery, and so unfit to be uncovered. In every truly national literature, the people *must* be represented; and if they cannot be exhibited as they are, they must be exhibited as they are not. Hence the pastoral poetry of Rome and Greece: it was the silver mask of a veiled people; and that of England and the other nations of Europe was simply a tame imitation of it.¹¹

Miller postulates that after the decline of the pastoral, literature improved its representation of the working classes only marginally. Fielding inclines towards

¹⁰ In the same way, Lydia Miller's tedious *Passages in the Life of an English Heiress* (1847), with its overweening desire to instruct its readership in the good cause of Evangelical dissent, evinces that same puritanical nervousness about creative invention. It is probable that Miller had some hand in the execution of his wife's fictional project and in his review of the novel in 1848 explained that, 'though not quite of the opinion of the French philosophers, who thought that more might be learned from good novels and romances than from the great treatises on history and mortality, we are yet persuaded that there are cases in which the novel may be the best vehicle for conveying instruction' and he considered the 'anonymous' author's fictional exposition of the Disruption to furnish such a case, despite the fact that the story told within the book formed 'the least of its merits'. (Hugh Miller, Review of *Passages in the Life of an English Heiress* (*The Witness*, 1 January, 1848)) Similarly, when reviewing the first instalment of Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1855-57) in *The Witness* in 1855, Miller's primary criticism of the work was in its cynical portrayal of Christianity and the article concludes by advising Dickens to not to pander to the lowest in his readership by 'clothing the basest natures in virtue and that of religion in vice' and to devote his talents instead to 'the moral elevation of his fellow men'. ('Little Dorrit' (*The Witness*, 19 December, 1855)).

¹¹ Hugh Miller, 'Literature of the People' (*The Witness*, 27 October 1849).

caricature, Richardson lacks conviction while Smollett remains superficial. It is not until Burns, he contends, that the common man came to be represented in the literature of the nation in his full dimensions. Remarking on this working writer's influence, Miller concludes that 'the light which Burns cast revealed the Scottish peasantry to the *literati* of Britain as men of no inferior grade of stunted proportions; and the revelation has told upon our literature'. Burns, Miller observes, returned to the working man his intellect and his integrity. Jeanie Deans, he postulates, could not have arisen from 'a man so tinged with Toryism as Sir Walter Scott' had it not been for the humanising impact of Burns's writing. The point then, is not one of literary aesthetics but of the complex questions of artistic responsibility and literary representation. A false literature is a false history – its record denies the reality of a society's experience. It was this sense that the popular voice had gone unheard for too long that inspired Miller's ideological conviction in the importance of working-class autobiography. Just as Miller had recommended not only the exemplar of Burns's work, but his life also, the closing words of 'The Literature of the People' records a plea for the discovery and record of the working experience (underlined with a characteristic appeal to financial pragmatism):

What we would fain recommend is, that the working classes should themselves tell their own stories. A series of autobiographies of working men [...] would form one of perhaps the most valuable, and certainly not the least interesting, "Miscellanies," which the enterprise of the "Trade" has yet given to the country [...] the appetite which exists for information regarding the true state and feelings of the working classes should be satisfied with other than mere pictures of the imagination. A series of cheap volumes, such as we desiderate, would furnish many an interesting glimpse into the lives of the labouring poor, and deepen the interest in their welfare already so generally felt. And we are sure the scheme, if attempted by some judicious bookseller, would scarce fail to remunerate.¹²

¹² Hugh Miller, 'Literature of the People' (*The Witness*, 27 October 1849).

The working-class autobiography was a subject Miller would soon return to in another article later that year. In 'The People: Their Own Best Portrait Painters,' Miller again warns of the false representation of the working classes prevailing in contemporary society. And he advises that a wilful neglect of the working voice will only entrench the hostilities of an already dissatisfied and restless class. While he acknowledges the current fashion for the subject of the working classes, nevertheless he advises that the perspective of the bureaucratic and literary classes are often tainted by a desire to either vilify or prettify the humblest walks of society. Truth there may be in the Commissions and Committees of Enquiry into the lives of working people and even in some of the powerful projections of fiction, 'but truth told in an earnest spirit, and instinct with human feeling is better still, and hence the desire which we expressed on a former occasion for a gallery of autobiographical pictures of the industrious poor.'¹³ Miller was concerned that the 'industrious poor' were regarded *en masse*; a featureless, collective problem, which failed to distinguish the individual human identities of the working people. In 'The People: Their Own Best Portrait Painters' he warns against the distancing effect of detached scrutiny.

Viewed from a great elevation, almost all objects appear on the same level, and from a great distance, of very nearly the same colour. And it is thus with what, as if in illustration of the fact, are termed the *masses* when viewed from the upper walks of life. They seem of all one colour and the individuals who compose them all of one size. But, in truth, the people of all civilised countries are many coloured, and exceedingly various in their intellectual stature and moral standing.¹⁴

Miller's essay attempts to illustrate the difference in habit and manners within the working population and even from one artisan to another. In this, he rejects the false

¹³ Hugh Miller, 'The People: Their Own Best Portrait Painters' (*The Witness*, 5 December 1849).

¹⁴ Hugh Miller, 'The People: Their Own Best Portrait Painters' (*The Witness*, 5 December 1849).

and superficial representation of the working man and concludes by advocating the importance of their narrative autonomy:

What we chiefly desire in a gallery of Scottish autobiography that would introduce to us the labouring poor in their true colours, is vested in those thinking powers which they truly possess, not in the scanty modicum of intellect which mere *littérateurs*, with, mayhap, not very much themselves to spare, chose to bestow upon them, is simply the story of a single life, representative of each class in the country – the production of some reflective mind, possessed by no egotistical over-estimation of its own powers and not unacquainted with the philosophy of its own course.

Miller's words here anticipate the sentiments of the modern historian David Vincent. In his study of working-class autobiography, Vincent's words echo Miller's own objection that history has regarded the working experience only from the objective distance of establishment narratives as well as sharing Miller's advocacy of a necessary correlative to that partial record:

Where a working man would normally appear before the historian only in the monochromatic glare of a riot, or a passing organisation or movement, now he can be seen as a man who received a certain education, went to work at a particular age, is now trying to raise a family, is in prosperity or debt, good health or bad, has accompanying beliefs and interests, has previously been active in some field and not in others, and has a future which has already happened.¹⁵

Indeed, Vincent recognises that the popularity of the autobiographical genre amongst the working classes had precisely the political effect that Miller implicitly sought. As part of an internal dialogue within the working classes it was crucial in formulating a powerful sense of collective class consciousness amongst working people during the nineteenth century. As Antonio Gramsci has noted, class relations are not organised solely by the means of production but are affected by the complex interaction of one class in its relation to another. Just as the autobiography defines the relation of the

¹⁵ David Vincent, *Bread Knowledge and Freedom*, p. 6.

writer to the outside world, so too, according to Gramsci, does class consciousness depend upon the degree to which a social group has succeeded in defining its own independent conception of the world or whether it is sublimated to the controlling influence of an outside power. Vincent's study, therefore, highlights the importance of the working-class autobiography in its inscription of a shared experience and in 'bring[ing] us closer to this crucial area of class consciousness'.¹⁶ There is no evidence that Miller had read or was influenced by Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto* of 1848. However, Miller's overt rejection of middle class and establishment institutions of learning suggests that he was seeking an autonomous form, not only of expression, but also of understanding. His disregard for useful-knowledge literature¹⁷ (produced by the benevolent middle-class Society for The Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK)) for example, suggests an awareness of the importance of a self-defined class identity. His 1849 articles specifically stressed the need for the working people to record their own collective experience rather than have it recorded for them. And although Miller does not give a precise reason for his rejection of the useful-knowledge movement, it seems likely that he would have viewed it as a patronising project, spoon-feeding selected works to the masses and denying their intellectual autonomy. In *Schools and Schoolmasters* Miller wrote that:

All the attempts at originating a cheap literature that have failed, have been attempts pitched too low; the higher toned efforts have usually succeeded. If the writer of these chapters has been in any way successful in addressing himself to the Presbyterian people of Scotland, it has always been, not by writing *down* to them, but by doing his best on all occasions to write *up* to them. (S&S, 352-353)

¹⁶ David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, p. 11. I am also indebted to Vincent's discussion for my observations on the relevance of Gramsci's thought.

¹⁷ In *My Schools and Schoolmasters* he writes, 'Those intolerable nuisances the useful-knowledge books had not yet arisen, like tenebrious stars, on the intellectual horizon, to darken the world, and shed their blighting influence on the opening intellect of the "youth-hood."' (S&S, 27).

In his analysis of the useful knowledge movement, David Vincent concludes that it was this paternalistic class component of the SDUK that ultimately estranged a working-class readership. These kinds of middle-class organisation failed, Vincent observes, because ultimately they expressed the belief that 'useful knowledge was the discovery and property of the ruling class' and that 'by embarking on its pursuit the reader was necessarily identifying himself with the practises and the ideology of his social and economic superiors'.¹⁸ Just as *Scenes and Legends* in 1835 had sought to radically reclaim history in the voice of a traditional, oral culture, so too did Miller's autobiographical agenda express a desire for the working population to re-posses its own narrative. In his conclusion to the historical study of nineteenth-century working-class autobiography, Vincent makes the crucial observation that, in this genre alone, the working classes 'were both historians and representatives of the forces of historical change [...] the working classes had few history books other than these autobiographies, no historians other than those who remembered and the few who wrote.'¹⁹ Miller was one among several working men who took up the pen in the nineteenth century, but he stands almost alone as a working man risen from obscurity to authority and concerned with the singular aim of promoting the working-class experience, of challenging the exclusivity of the written word and of reclaiming the narratives of history and fiction for the working people.²⁰

The Philosophy of Self-Culture

In Miller's promotion of working-class autobiography, he was championing several social objectives at once. Whilst advocating the importance of cross-class

¹⁸ David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, p. 163.

¹⁹ David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, p. 167, 203

²⁰ Vincent notes that, of his study of some 142 working-class autobiographers, Miller is the only one to ascend to the middle class, both by marriage and employment. It was this position of status that gave him his unique role as a working man representing the possibilities of social and literary autonomy.

communication and the reclaiming of working-class narrative autonomy, a third and crucial objective was implicit in these aims. With industrialism's increasing polarisation between the owners of production and those who laboured to produce, market divisions soon came to dictate social and political divisions. Not only were the working classes the underdogs of production but their commercial deficit translated into a political and social impotence. In response to the political debate about enfranchisement and social reform that dominated the nineteenth century, Miller responded with the belief that intellectual empowerment must precede political emancipation.

From the nineteenth century onwards, Scott and Carlyle's emphasis on common sense and the primacy of social empathy had influenced British writing right through to Dickens, Disraeli and Elizabeth Gaskell. Dickens, like Miller, maintained a suspicion of Party politics and institutions and he condemned the middle class tendency to patronise and coddle the working man and 'to make a baby of him'.²¹ Dickens, too, insisted upon the dignity and independence of working people and his novels convey a radical empathy with the inner lives and emotions of a class that had hitherto been indiscriminately judged *en masse*. In the same way, Disraeli's depictions of the complex psychologies of his characters indicated a shift from political rationalism towards a more introspective analysis of human motivations and social conditions. It is clear from Miller's *Witness* article on Disraeli's politics²² that Miller was an admirer of the political novelist. Perhaps more than with Dickens, whose cynical attitudes towards Victorian religion invited Miller's criticism,²³ Miller shared a conservative radicalism with Disraeli. Both believed in the value of time-honoured institution and in social

²¹ Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. by Walter Dexter 3 vols (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1938), III, 381-2.

²² Hugh Miller, 'D'Israeli on Politics' [sic] (*The Witness*, 6 August, 1856)

²³ See footnote 10.

hierarchy as well as social mobility. In fact, like Cobbett and Ruskin in his *Fors Clavigera* (1870), Miller's social conception, which retained a respect for the old systems of benevolent aristocracy, could border on anachronism. As we have seen, Miller did not stand on the side of 'the mere loquacious Chartists, full of words but infirm of judgement and devoid of principle',²⁴ or the socialists. He regarded them as common stump orators who only sought to replace the existing powers with a new populist hegemony:

Our dread of universal, or even mere household suffrage, is derived chiefly from our long and intimate acquaintance with the classes into whose hands it would throw the political power of the country. "A poor man that oppreseth the poor," says Solomon, "is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food." Alas! tyranny as the wise man well knew, is not the exclusive characteristic of the wealthy and the powerful, nor is oppression the offence of a mere class. It is not the aristocracy, and they only, that are cruel and unjust: the poor can also override the natural liberties of the poor, and trample upon their rights; and it is according to our experience that there is more of this injustice and tyranny among that movement class now known as Chartists, but which we have closely studied under other names, when coming in contact with them in strikes, combinations and political meetings, than in perhaps any other class in the country.²⁵

Like Carlyle, Miller was deeply suspicious of those who sought to break with the establishment. Destruction for destruction's sake was no remedy to the social ills of the times and more profound solutions would have to be envisaged before change could be achieved. Both Carlyle and Miller believed passionately that the symptoms of a degenerate society were representative of a deeper, inner spiritual decay. In an essay on 'Our Working Classes' in 1854 Miller questioned the value of a superficial rearrangement of external circumstances in effecting real change.

We have passed laws; we have devised model dwellings; we have sent pious men to hunt out ignorance and vice; we have schemed out theories that would mow down the institutions of ages; we have speculated in the direction of secular socialism and in the direction of Christian socialism; we have tried co-operative

²⁴ Hugh Miller, 'The Franchise' (*The Witness*, 7 June 1848).

²⁵ Hugh Miller, 'The Franchise' (*The Witness*, 7 June 1848).

societies, building societies, and model lodgings; we have written, lectured and taught; we have appointed commissions, printed acres of reports; pried into every hole and corner of society [...] And what has been the result? Have we moved the living mass of our workpeople a single step higher in the scale of moral existence? Have we taught them wisdom as well as knowledge? Have we taught them to be provident, and to manage their own affairs with prudence and discretion? Have we placed them in circumstances where they fulfil their duties as men? Have we, in fact, succeeded, after all our labours, in promoting the genuine welfare of the working population?²⁶

It might be inferred from these words that Miller rejected progressive politics. He did not deny the value of modern progress but insisted that progress should not come to apply to material advances alone. Bureaucratic and abstract investigations were of little import to a man of Miller's eminently practical thinking. In this essay he argued simply for two fundamental conditions, 'the integrity of the family and the sufficiency of the dwelling', without which 'there can be no satisfactory reform, either in a sanitary or a moral aspect'. Miller was not insensible then, to the necessity for material change. Yet these necessities stood merely as a condition for the greater task of re-educating the moral sensibilities:

To promote the habit of providence in our working classes, it is not only necessary to exhibit a moral restriction which cautions them from going wrong, but to present a positive stimulus which induces them to go right, - to exhibit something good before their eyes, after which they shall strive, - and to make them act of their own free will, as if they had an object to attain. This stimulus may possibly be found in the desire to possess real property; and although no mere change of laws or circumstances may ever do more than facilitate the progress of good, it is quite possible that a change of circumstances might eminently promote a change of habits.²⁷

In an essay on the 'Scotch Poor Law' in 1843, Miller specified exactly what shape that 'change of habit' ought to take. Once again he attacked the Chartists for offering a hopeless political dream when the vital causes of change lay nearer to hand. Education and morality were to be the prescriptives of Miller's social revolution. And the lessons

²⁶ Hugh Miller, 'Our Working Classes' (*The Witness*, 17 June 1854).

²⁷ Hugh Miller, 'Our Working Classes' (*The Witness*, 17 June 1854).

of education were to be sanctioned by the wisdom of religion. Extending into matters of social concern, Miller applied his theological understanding to the dilemmas of morality and reform. The Presbyterian concept of original individual sin and its consequent corruption of society were axiomatic to Miller and it was for this reason that he believed that only a spiritual reform could absolve society of its ills. In a *Witness* article of 1849 he stated unequivocally that 'we repeat that the whole philosophy of social evils and social reforms centres on this, that man is a fallen creature'.²⁸ Perhaps it was this Presbyterian perspective of the fallen nature of mankind that prevented Miller from being dogmatic in his diagnosis of social evils. If all men were fallen, then the blame for society's failings could not lie solely upon the actions (or inaction) of one single class. The working classes needed Christian charity to rescue them from their degradation just as did the abusive aristocrat and industrialist, the slave and the slaveholder. Just as Carlyle had warned in his *Signs of the Times* in 1829 that 'to reform a world, to reform a nation, no wise man will undertake; and all but foolish men know, that the only solid though a far slower reformation, is what each begins and perfects on *himself*',²⁹ so for Miller the question of social salvation was ultimately a personal one derived from the intimate message of Christ's teachings. If Miller was promoting a new working-class 'culture', (to borrow the language of Matthew Arnold), then his conception of social arrangements was not far from Arnold's own Christian-Humanist notion of a 'disinterested', socially-concerned 'best self' realised through the union of morals and aesthetics. Miller's biblical interpretation of society was never so literal as to inhibit his judgement or social perspective, its moral message remained

²⁸ Hugh Miller, 'National Evils and Practical Remedies' [review of James S. Buckingham, *National Evils and Practical Remedies*] (*The Witness*, 26 September 1849). For a full discussion of Miller's ethics and theology see John Cooke, 'The Social Teaching of Hugh Miller' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 1977).

²⁹ Thomas Carlyle *Signs of the Times* in *Thomas Carlyle: Selected Writings*, ed. by Alan Shelston (London: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 59-87, (p. 85).

fundamental to his vision of self-culture and social ethics. Moreover, if Carlyle responded to social division with a personal prophecy of transcendental idealism and Miller held to the traditional values of the Presbyterian Church, then both writers balanced their spiritualism in advocating a doctrine of action: Carlyle in the imperative to Labour and the initiation of exemplary accomplishment manifest in the *Hero* and Miller in a philosophy of self-culture.

In an early *Witness* essay of 1842, Miller opened with the confident assertion that, 'it was the religion of Scotland that first developed the intelligence of the country'.³⁰ Just as in *Scenes and Legends*, where the wisdom of folk culture had been illustrated by 'an ignorant old woman, who of all the books ever written, was acquainted with only the Bible', (*SL*, 1) Miller's essay considered the example of Annie McDonald, mother to the self-educated Alexander and John Bethune, at various times labourers and weavers and who became recognised writers. Contemplating her grandson's memoir of her life, Miller congratulated the deep devotion and faith and the 'high toned yet chastened spirit of independence'³¹ which it illustrated. In this essay, Annie McDonald becomes the exemplar of the pious wisdom of the intelligent working classes. Miller understood, not least from his own experience, the power of education and learning in raising oneself within society. However, experience too had taught him that intelligence and wisdom were different things. For Miller, a man who was bright of mind but foolish in his morals might yet make the best of thieves. In his philosophy of self-culture, moral education was therefore crucial in raising the working man from the gutters of society. Mere intelligence must be tempered by moral insight in order to direct man upon his proper course. In a critique upon 'The Bothy System' in 1841 Miller warned that a man degraded to the level of the animal will have recourse to the

³⁰ Hugh Miller, 'Annie McDonald and the Fifeshire Forester' (*The Witness*, 10 August 1842).

³¹ Hugh Miller, 'Annie McDonald and the Fifeshire Forester' (*The Witness*, 10 August 1842).

morality of the beast. Man's soul was by God's creation immortal, and must be nurtured if it was to remain good. It was therefore society's responsibility to see that all men were enabled to live in conditions conducive to his higher nature:

We have seen more than the outside of bothies, and know from experience, that though they may be fit dwellings for hogs and horses, they are not fit dwellings for immortal creatures, who begin in this world their education for eternity.³²

This final phrase, 'man's education for eternity' is crucial to Miller's social vision. Worldly experience was but a testing ground for the afterlife and if a man did not possess individual moral responsibility then the duty fell to those who could care for him and guard the immortality of his soul. Thus, Miller warns the abusive proprietor (and, by extension, the indifferent classes) that, 'men, when they are spoiled, spoil all other things'.³³ It was in society's interest to preserve the conditions for moral elevation. Similarly, in his analysis of the punitive Scottish Poor Law Miller asserted:

Mere intellectual education is not enough to enable men to live well, either in the upper or lower walks of society, and especially in the latter. The moral nature must also be educated. Was Robert Burns an ignorant or unintelligent man? Or yet Robert Ferguson? [sic]³⁴

Miller's conception of self-culture was thus a composite of moral integrity and intellectual understanding. The proliferation of Mutual Improvement Societies which sprung up in nineteenth-century Britain were inspired by a desire not only for intellectual advancement but with the intention that learning would confer a greater sense of moral probity. The term 'improvement' was not merely an intellectual concept but contained a whole corpus of values central to the social ethic of the nineteenth century: diligence, sobriety, self-reliance and temperance. In 'An Unspoken Speech'

³² Hugh Miller, 'The Bothy System' (*The Witness*, 22 September 1841).

³³ Hugh Miller, 'The Bothy System' (*The Witness*, 22 September 1841).

³⁴ Hugh Miller, 'Pauperism' (*The Witness*, 20 March 1840).

Miller envisaged a sermon of advice such as might be offered to the young men of a mutually improving society. The essay is typical of those moral imperatives of the Victorian the age. However, Miller speaks to the working youth not as an imperious superior, but as a paternal advisor, risen himself from the culture of self-improvement. Once more, he is adjusting his voice to a working audience, emphasising not eloquence and assurance but 'a man of slow speech and of slow tongue'.³⁵ He has none of the authoritative pedagogy of a Carlyle or the self-assurance of a Disraeli or Ruskin. His tone is quietly inclusive, inviting his readership to share in the lessons of his own experience.

We wish that, amid the elegance of this hall, we could bring up before you some of the scenes of our past life. They would form a curious panorama, and might serve to teach that in no circumstances, however apparently desperate, should men loose hope.³⁶

Finally, he implores them to engrave '*Nil Desperandum*' on their hearts. It is an emotive piece of writing, which while it advocates the values of industry and perseverance, yet empathetically acknowledges the working man's suffering and self-doubt. Nevertheless, he warns that 'half-efforts never accomplish anything' and he cautions his young students that 'climbing requires not only a steady foot, but a strong head' as an admonishment against the temptations of alcohol. In this, the 'Unspoken Speech' recalls Cobbett's *Advice to Young Men* of 1829, which closed with an admonition to 'Be just, be industrious, be sober and be happy.' Miller's speech, however, has less of the self-assurance of Cobbett. The essence of his message lies in his exhortation to make best use of the hours of working drudgery by furnishing oneself with a thinking mind, advising his readers to 'think of yourself as not in a prison but in a school and there is no fear but that you will rise.' Education is the means by which

³⁵ Hugh Miller, 'An Unspoken Speech' (*The Witness*, 14 December 1850).

³⁶ Hugh Miller, 'An Unspoken Speech' (*The Witness*, 14 December 1850).

the working man shall raise himself, if not in material status, then at least in intellectual equality. And the emancipation of the mind, is a matter, Miller contends, superior to liberty from labour. Intelligence is a mark of independence, whereas financial patronage may make a man a different kind of slave. The integrity of independence was crucial to Miller's conception of working-class self-education. Self-reliance was therefore a fundamental feature of the moral and intellectual journey of self-culture:

Never sacrifice yourself to a phantom [...] though a man may think himself above his work, no man is, or no man ought to think himself above the high dignity of being independent [...] Rely upon yourselves.³⁷

Patronage, Miller argues, is often wrongly endowed and makes wasters of the men who wait for it. Finally, he recommends an eclectic reading: 'Strive to be catholic in your tastes. Some of you will have a leaning to science, some to literature', and he advises that literature can liberalise the sciences while science is required to inform literature.

Miller's sermon of self-culture is one therefore, which recommends a generalist programme of self-education tempered by hard work, sobriety and above all independence. With a working population trained in self-reliance and shaped by the pursuit of learning, Miller believed that society could alleviate much of its social problems. He was not against political reform and actively championed the cause of the 1832 Reform Bill.³⁸ However, he viewed political protest as a secondary priority in the fight against social degradation and inequality. The disparity was due to lack of opportunity, of access to self-supporting labour, financial independence and intellectual autonomy. When Miller attacked the Scottish Poor Law in 1840 it was because he

³⁷ Hugh Miller, 'An Unspoken Speech' (*The Witness*, 14 December 1850).

³⁸ In *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, Miller writes; 'And so I continued to watch with interest the course of the Reform Bill, and was delighted to see it, after a passage singularly stormy and precarious, at length safely moored in port.' (*S&S*, 469)

viewed such a solution as a debasement of personal dignity and autonomy.³⁹ In the poor house, the working man was made the subject of wretched charity and compulsory labour. Miller rejected such myopic solutions. His own social vision was long-term. Like Chalmers, he advocated a radical re-education of the mind and moral character in a system of social reform, with the objective of enabling the poor to help themselves.

The Importance of Autonomy

The importance of working-class self-culture was a crucial element in Miller's stance towards the establishment. As we have suggested, a fundamental aspect of Miller's promotion of working-class writing was his attempt to shape an alternative canon of voices which might speak directly to the experience of the working people. Similarly, his rejection of middle-class educating and improvement movements such as the SDUK was a rejection of their paternalistic approach. Self-culture, in Miller's view, ought to take, in itself, an independent cast. One of the dilemmas, which contributed to the eventual dissolution of the SDUK, was a debate about the censorship of material published for the working classes. Whilst light fiction and morality tracts were felt to be acceptable, many in the movement were wary of giving the people access to economic, political and radical literature. The impact of Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* hung in the middle class memory like a warning. But to the working-class intellectuals of the self-culture movement, men such as Thomas Hardy, the influential founder of the London Corresponding Society and Hugh Miller, the real issue was one of access to reading and writing, regardless of middle-class condonation. Miller consciously side-stepped the constrained useful-knowledge movement, advocating that the people pursue

³⁹ Hugh Miller, 'The Scotch Poor Law' (*The Witness*, 20 March 1840).

a broad range of reading materials and, most importantly, a self-directed, independent programme of study.

Miller's impassioned belief in the value of self-culture rejected the agenda of narrow institutional learning. His philosophy of education radically challenged the established institutions, emphasising the values of experience and personal freedom. Indeed, much of Miller's writing expresses a distinct antipathy towards establishment learning. In his 1829 letter to Baird he reflected:

My acquaintance with men of education, though not very extensive is yet sufficiently so to convince me that the people whose capacities average between mediocrity and the lower intellect are rather injured than benefited by being scholars. Men of this kind when bred up to a common mechanical profession are generally quiet and unpretending, useful to society and possessed of an almost instinctive knowledge of those rules of conduct and attention to which makes easy the passage through life. As scholars, however, they frequently bear a character much the reverse of this. I have met with such newly set loose from College, and have taken an inventory of their intellectual stock [...] A smattering of Greek and Latin; an affected admiration of writings whose merits they have neither taste nor judgement enough to appreciate; a few confused philosophical notions; a few broken ideas, the imperfect transcripts, not of things, but of other ideas; an ability of conveying trite thoughts in common language; a pride that gloats enraptured over these attainments; and a sincere contempt for the class of people whom they deem the ignorant.⁴⁰

This is a damning portrait indeed and one usefully compared with Miller's illustration of the intelligent working man. In the above passage, Miller is reflecting upon his friend, John Swanson's (latterly Reverend Swanson) return from College. Swanson himself, however, is accredited with being 'one of the few persons who become wise in proportion as they grow learned'.⁴¹ Later he is compared favourably with the self-taught stonemason, John Wilson, who 'was in short, a philosopher of the same school with my friend at Niddry'.⁴² Miller offers a comparison quite the reverse of what one might expect. The College graduate is congratulated upon having equal intelligence with the

⁴⁰ Hugh Miller, 'letter to Baird', pp. 224–225.

⁴¹ Hugh Miller, 'letter to Baird', p. 224.

⁴² Hugh Miller, 'letter to Baird', p. 225.

working man. The passage is significant also in revealing Miller's early conception of the nature of learning: the scholar's knowledge is found to be pretentious and insubstantial while the self-taught man lends to his intelligence a degree of gravity and depth which accounts for the wisdom of his understanding. As we have seen, the notion of wisdom had a special significance for Miller connotative of a degree of spiritual or moral insight. The flightiness of the scholar is suggestive of a lack of moral gravity arising from a life of intellectual abstraction unbounded to the realities of hard work and the touchstone of a simple faith. In 'Recollections of Ferguson,' Miller has the rustic John Hogg comment to the poet:

"Ye study, an' study, till your brains gang aboot like a whirligig; an' then, like bairns in a boat that see the land sailin', ye think it's the solid yearth that's turnin' roun.' An' this ye ca' philosophy; as if David haudna tauld us that the world sits coshly on the waters, an' canna be moved."⁴³

Just as John Hogg rejects the dizzying mirage of metaphysics, so too Miller avowed his suspicions of the traps of intellectual sophistry. In a letter to Lydia written in 1835, Miller described the process of his own self-education and his wariness about the dangers of the over-analytical mind:

Years passed on and man became my study. I delighted in tracing the progress of the human species from the extreme of barbarism to that of refinement and in marking the various shades of intellectual character. Studies of a more abstract class succeeded, and I became a metaphysician. I strove to penetrate into the first causes and to anticipate the remoter consequences of things [...] but I soon perceived that the over-subtle thinker reaps only a harvest of doubt, and that when truth is our object, it is quite as possible to miss the mark by overshooting as by falling short.⁴⁴

Miller's intellectual progress makes clear reference to the thinking of the Enlightenment, but his conclusion suggests that such philosophical speculations may,

⁴³ Hugh Miller, 'Recollections of Ferguson' in *Tales and Sketches*, p. 10.

⁴⁴ Hugh Miller, letter to Lydia, quoted in Bayne, I, 309 (1835).

in fact, over-step what he describes as 'truth': an absolute use of the term which suggests God's revealed Truth. To the theological cast of Miller's mind, an intelligence that lacked spiritual faith was in danger of becoming sterile and abstruse. For Miller, a sense of spiritual awe and a humble acknowledgement of human frailty in the face of Creation moderated against a deluded and immodest assumption of intellectual comprehension. Offering his initial impressions of the sermons of the Reverend Stewart of Cromarty in a letter to Swanson, Miller accused the minister of preaching 'to the understanding, but not to the heart'. The heart, it would appear from his words, was the place of wisdom, the place where God's Truth resided:

The knowledge [the sermons] display of human nature is often vague and general, and such as is to be taught by books. Of that particular and striking kind which is to be acquired by *the study of our own hearts or the characters of others*, there is to be found in them few instances.⁴⁵ [my emphasis]

For Miller, the value of education lay, not in hypothetical qualities but, crucially, in empirical lessons. The value of experience and observation in cultivating a thinking mind stressed in the very first of Miller's writings, in the 1829 'letter to Baird', culminates in his most famous discussion of education, the autobiographical *My Schools and Schoolmasters* of 1854. The subtitle advises its readership that the story of one's life might also be the story of one's education and that an equally relevant component of education is what each man experiences and understands for himself. In his account Miller not only stressed the wisdom and learning of the self-taught and working man but also the value of worldly experience. His lessons were not such as to be taught by the Universities. Instead he translates his time in the mason's bothy into an exercise of sociological analysis, his tramping through the towns to the cities of the

⁴⁵ Hugh Miller, letter to John Swanson, quoted in Bayne, I, 208 (1827).

country as an exercise in anthropology, and his amateur fascination with the local landscape as an example of geologic enquiry.

And as with his lessons, so with his teachers. The 'schoolmasters' of Miller's somewhat ironic title are the common worker and villager. Their lessons are sometimes intellectual (as with his uncles, John Wilson, George Munro or Isabelle Mackenzie) but often too they are humane. Alongside discussions about the philosophical merits of Hume and Flavel, Miller includes the lessons of piety, taught by his grandmother; kindness, taught by the local simpleton, Danie, and perseverance, taught by all those who labour for their living. Nothing in a man's life, therefore, could be discredited as useless to his education, intellectual and moral. In addressing the book specifically to the working men of Scotland, Miller sought to offer an exemplar of learning that all men could access. The attainment of intellectual equality, it stressed, need not be achieved only through the entrenched paths of the academic institutions. Indeed, to live a self-educated life was to remain apart from the establishment values necessarily promoted in an established institution. In 'Criticism for the Uninitiated', a series of *Witness* articles written in 1840, Miller anticipates Ruskin and William Morris in questioning the claim of the elite classes to ownership of the criticism of art and arguing for a more socially open critical culture. Peter Bayne has remarked that Miller was 'animated by a quiet, half-conscious but steadfast ambition for self-culture', and possessed 'a deep-lying conviction of his ability to rise above the sphere in which he [found] himself placed'.⁴⁶ Miller may not have been politically radical, and could at times tend towards the feudal socialism about which Marx was so scathing in his *Communist Manifesto*. But, if Miller possessed a conservative respect for the paternal aristocracy he retained an sympathetic identification with the experience of the

⁴⁶ Peter Bayne, I, 93.

labouring classes and his life and work offered a steady and practical example of what might be achieved by a working man. He actively sought to make that example known, to share his belief that the working man ought never to despair of attaining status in the world. For Miller, self-culture enacted the working man's right to intellectual freedom and his special ability to ground his learning in the gravity of moral understanding. Self-education liberated the people from the controlling values of the establishment and allowed them a crucial independence in their intellectual journey. In this way, Miller sought to advocate a life of dignity and autonomy and to express to the working people of Scotland a different kind of voice that might record a new history of the working-class experience.

Chapter Eleven:

The Moderate Evangel: Hugh Miller, Common Sense Philosophy and the Free Church of Scotland

Hugh Miller and the Philosophy of Common Sense

Given Miller's ambivalent relationship with the Enlightenment, an understanding of the critical response of the eighteenth-century Scottish philosophers helps to contextualise Miller's own scepticism towards Humean subjectivity and his resistance to the culture of nineteenth-century individualism. The writings of these common sense philosophers further illuminate Miller's own ideological relationship to literature and society and help to contextualise him within a body of thought that was highly respected and influential in his own day.

As I have noted in chapter three, Miller repeatedly named his greatest philosophical influence as that of Francis Bacon, the seventeenth-century scientist and thinker who represented to Miller a resolution of the apparent contradictions between the material and immaterial world. In his influential *History of the Scottish Philosophy* (1875), James McCosh names Bacon as one of the precursors of the common sense philosophy, and in a later essay wrote that common sense 'has all along professed a profound reverence for Bacon'.¹ As the progenitor of the inductive school of thought, Bacon was a seminal influence on the empirical method of common sense philosophy. S.A. Grave, in his analysis of common sense in 1960, concerned himself with the 'connexion [sic] between a philosophy of common sense and a Baconian reformation of the philosophy of the mind'.² Thomas Reid, together with his predecessor, Francis

¹ James McCosh, 'Characteristics of the Scottish School and Comparison of It With the Critical Philosophy of Kant' (1887) reprinted in Daniel Sommer Robinson, *The Story of Scottish Philosophy* (New York: Exposition Press, 1961), pp. 271-80, (p. 271).

² S. A. Grave, *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 2.

Hutcheson, commonly regarded as two of the founders of the common sense school, utilised Bacon's inductive method to reply to the hypothetical constructs of Hume's *Inquiry Into the Human Mind* (1848). The Scottish school (as the common sense thinkers were frequently termed) was, in fact, a reply to Hume's philosophy which they regarded as the expression of sophistry, scepticism and infidelity.³ Miller could not agree with David Hume's scepticism and naturally found sympathy with those who countered his arguments in the common sense school. In a letter to William Ross as early as 1828, Miller stated his criticisms of Hume's conclusions.

The few intelligent sceptics I have been acquainted with, I have invariably found as ignorant of religion as I myself was four years ago, and from my present knowledge of it I conclude (and it would be difficult to prove my conclusion false) that all its enemies, even the most acute, are thus ignorant. I have perused the essays of Hume, one of the best reasoners, perhaps, the world has ever produced, and on rising from that perusal this estimate appeared to me juster [sic] than ever.⁴

This judgement upon Hume was not moderated with time. In an 1840 *Witness* article Miller described Hume as 'at once the shrewdest infidel that ever opposed the truth, and the ablest historian that ever perverted it'.⁵ *My Schools and Schoolmasters* reveals that he had read at least some of the writing of Thomas Reid.⁶ And in a *Witness* essay critiquing the idealistic school, Miller stated his approval that the recent Chair of Logic at Edinburgh University had gone to the common sense philosopher, Campbell Fraser, rather than a Humean idealist:

³ When James Beattie popularised the notion of an appeal to common sense philosophy with his *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism* (1770), Reynolds celebrated its success with a picture of Sophistry, Scepticism and Infidelity fleeing before the face of Truth, Beattie at her side with the *Essay on Truth* under his arm. In Burns's *The Holy Fair* (1785) *Fun, Superstition and Hypocrisy* make their way to the profane Mauchline Fair where shallow fanaticism preaches in place of Moderate good sense: 'common-sense has taen the road | An' aff, an' up the Cowgate | Fast, fast that day.' (ll. 142 – 4).

⁴ Hugh Miller, letter to William Ross, quoted in Bayne, I, 226 (May 1828).

⁵ Hugh Miller, 'Dr Thomas McCrie' (*Witness*, 27 June 1840).

⁶ "He next inquired respecting my reading of the metaphysicians. "Had I read Reid?" "Yes." "Brown?" "Yes." "Hume?" "Yes" (S&S, 389).

We must be permitted to express our sincere pleasure that the election of Tuesday has resulted in the selection of an assertor of the Scotch school of philosophy to teach in the leading Scotch University. Nor are we influenced by any idle preference for the mere name Scotch. We know not that so large an amount of ingenuity has been expended on that common-sense school of which Reid was the founder, and Beattie, Hamilton and Dugald Stewart the exponents, as on the antagonistic school, which at least equally distinguished Scotsmen, such as Hume and Thomas Brown have illustrated and adorned.⁷

The 'ingenuities' of Hume and Brown were to Miller nothing but sophisticated, though fallacious, reasoning. Thus, Miller adopts the same grounds as the common sense philosophers themselves in what they regarded as rejecting the intellectual sophistry of false philosophy.

Ralph Jessop, in his study of *Carlyle and Scottish Thought* (1997), identifies the 'Scottish' strain of thinking which characterises common sense philosophy. He summarises the philosophy's articulation of Scottish thought as, amongst other features, 'the distrust of individual and unwarranted authority; egalitarianism; the emphasis on intuition; pragmatism; practicality [and] communality or shared experience.'⁸ In examining Miller's relationship with (and possible debt to) common sense thought, I wish to examine in particular those aspects of the philosophy which are prominent and shared by Miller's own thinking; principally, the rejection of an introverted subjectivity articulated by sceptical philosophy, the emphasis on egalitarianism and anti-elitism, the intuitive basis of knowledge and the agnostic (and possibly religious) acknowledgement of an ultimate human nescience, and, finally, the values of community and social order.

For Reid, Hume's philosophy in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) led to a nihilistic scepticism concerning all things spiritual, intellectual and physical. Hume's proposition that our beliefs derived from 'ideas', received through a cognitive

⁷ Hugh Miller, 'The Idealistic School' (*Witness*, 19 July 1856).

⁸ Ralph Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 78.

imputation upon sensory experience rather than a direct 'knowledge' of external objects, led to what Reid and his followers described as a 'solitary subjectivity'. For the common sense thinkers, the implication was that if our experience of the world was merely an individual projection of mind, then we could no longer rely upon a shared experience of external reality. Moreover, Hume's theories fundamentally called into question the possibility of divine omniscience, given that it is a mere association of ideas that produces what we call our 'beliefs'. Thus, for Reid, the implications of Hume's thinking are distressing because, according to Hume there is 'nothing existing in nature, but impressions and ideas following each other'.⁹ Instead Reid believed that philosophy was not merely an individual concern for the educated elite but affected the whole course of human activity, and he feared that the adoption of such sceptical thinking could lead to the atomisation of society. 'Every social affection freezes at the thought! [...] Every social tie is broken, and every social affection is stifled.'¹⁰ As S. A. Grave describes it:

The ruin of worlds, the Dedication to [Reid's] *Inquiry* declares, with virtue brought down in the general catastrophe, is in the principle that ideas are the mind's only immediate objects. Sun, moon, and stars, body and soul, 'all things without exception' dissolve into subjective atoms as fugitive as the experience of them. For the necessary consequence of the principle that ideas are the mind's only immediate objects is that they are its only objects, the only things that there are at all.¹¹

The common sense philosophers rejected Hume's hypothesis on the basis that, by the method of induction and the theory of first principles, such conclusions are empirically absurd. They were suspicious of a theory that proceeded by analogy, as Hume's did, desecrating it as a system of illusions parcelled in nothing but the biblical 'rope of sand'.

⁹ Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man, The Works of Thomas Reid*, preface, notes and supplementary dissertations by Sir William Hamilton (Edinburgh: MacLachlan, Stewart; London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1846) VI, 142.

¹⁰ Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, VI, 446.

¹¹ S. A. Grave, *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense*, pp. 11-12.

Reid termed Hume's hypothesis 'the reveries of vain and fanciful men whose pride makes them conceive themselves able to unfold the mysteries of nature by the force of their genius'¹², while Adam Ferguson insisted on empirical methods by arguing that 'an author writes from observations he has made on his subject, not from the suggestion of books; and every production carries the mark of his character as a man, not of his mere proficiency as a student or a scholar'.¹³ As these words imply, there is a strain of anti-elitism which marks the writing of the common sense philosophers. Jessop summarises the meaning of the term 'common sense' itself, as 'the good sense of people of practical affairs'.¹⁴ And the first principles from which common sense philosophy derives its arguments are intended as the basic philosophic assumptions governing our everyday experience:

From such propositions as these – *I exist; I am the same person that I was yesterday; the material world has an existence independent of my mind; the general laws of nature will continue, in future, to operate uniformly as in time past* – no inference can be deduced, any more than from the intuitive truths prefixed to the Elements of Euclid.¹⁵

Reid and his followers were at pains to indicate that all men share an immediate process of perception which operates prior to conscious reasoning. The first principles which Reid laid down were therefore intended to signal man's basic and *a priori* understanding preceding all theorising. Reid's term 'common sense' taken as meaning 'down to earth good sense' mocks intellectual pretension without being anti-intellectual. Fanciful theorising and abstract philosophy were liable to become detached from the common concerns of society and could do more harm to the intellectual community than mundane ideas. Common sense was not simply a democratic

¹² Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, I, 50.

¹³ Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, (London: T.C Cadwell and W. Davies, 1773), p. 483.

¹⁴ Ralph Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought*, p. 76.

¹⁵ Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, III, 45-46.

approach, however: it was not the appeal to the majority in philosophical questions but the intention to ground philosophy on those first principles which constitute our natural understanding of the world. As Jessop writes:

Reid [...] continuously strives to ground [philosophy] on the broad basis of shared human experience instead of the solipsistic introspection disconnected from social interaction with which Hume begins his outline of the theory of ideas in the *Treatise*.¹⁶

Common sense posits that true first principles are temporally prior both to education and the use of reasoning. This theory recalls Miller's own distinction between intellectual understanding and wisdom. It was because Miller believed that mankind could possess an inherently valuable understanding of the world that he could attest the 'wisdom' of the untutored man or the 'ignorant old woman, who of all the books ever written, was acquainted with only the Bible'.¹⁷ It is this 'common sense' rejection of intellectual abstraction that inspires the words of his John Hogg in 'Recollections of Ferguson' when he accuses philosophy of undermining the natural laws of our understanding.¹⁸ The very basis of Miller's intellectual critique, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, was that all men possessed a hitherto unrecognised potential for learning and that even some of the most 'educated' scholars could not approach the 'good sense' of the common man.

Indeed, the religious implications of Miller's understanding of wisdom (as opposed to intellectualism) are also indicated in common sense philosophy. Reid's claim that 'every conclusion got by reasoning must rest with its whole weight upon first

¹⁶ Ralph Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought*, p. 79.

¹⁷ Hugh Miller, *Scenes and Legends*, p. 1.

¹⁸ 'Ye study an' study, till your brains gang about like a whirligig; an' then, like bairns in a boat that see the land sailin', ye think it's the solid 'yearth that turnin' roun'. An' this ye ca' philosophy, as if David haudna tauld us that the world sits coshly on the waters.' 'Recollections of Ferguson', *Tales and Sketches* p. 10.

principles, as the building does upon its foundation',¹⁹ was utilised by his student, William Hamilton in the latter's 'Philosophy of Perception,' in which he argued for 'the fact of an intuitive Perception', that 'every *how* rests ultimately on a *that*; every demonstration is deduced from something *given* and *indemonstrable*; all that is comprehensible, hangs from some *revealed fact*.'²⁰

Indeed, if Reid and Hamilton's theories of perception implied an immediate conviction and belief of something external, this led them to the ultimate conclusion that the human mind is akin to the inspiration of God. The philosophy of common sense, which itself accepts the, often unanalysable, nature of the mind thus confesses that human nature is ultimately ignorant of ultimate realities. This being so, common sense is at least agnostic, in its accession to the possibility of inscrutable forces at work in the world. Alexander Broadie expresses it more bluntly: 'It is pointless to ask why things are [such as they are ...] if pressed further on the matter, Reid would refer, as he often does, to the wise judgement of God whose creatures we are'.²¹ Furthermore, Broadie continues, 'Reid appears to have held that the truth of common sense beliefs is underpinned by a benevolent God who created us with such a nature as to find those beliefs irresistible.'²² Rather than accepting Hume's principle of transference (from sensation to idea) as an explanation of knowledge, Hamilton and Reid argued that knowledge originates 'from the incomprehensible' and by extension that knowledge originates from God. The end of such a philosophy may well be to humbly concede to human ignorance, an end which, notably, Hamilton himself saw as marking the

¹⁹ Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind*, VI, 435.

²⁰ William Hamilton, *Discussions on Philosophy and Literature, Education and University Reform* (Edinburgh: MacLachlan and Stewart; London: Brown, Green and Longmans, 1853), p. 63.

²¹ Alexander Broadie, *The Tradition of Scottish Philosophy: A New Perspective on the Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990), p. 109.

²² Alexander Broadie, *The Tradition of Scottish Philosophy*, p.118.

beginnings of theology.²³ S. A. Grave is explicit about the place of God in common sense philosophy:

It is God, in fact, in Reid's philosophy, who lays the foundations of common sense. (The mottoes of Reid's first two books are: "The inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." "Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts?")²⁴

In this way, common sense philosophy replied to Humean scepticism with logic and rationality but left a dignified silence in the face of the unknowable. Yet the acknowledgement of the possibility of the Divine was not regarded as a loophole in the logic of the common sense school. To such criticisms Hamilton made the reply:

It is a poor philosophy that eschews the *Deus ex machina* and yet ties the knot which is only soluble by [man's] interposition. It is not unphilosophical to assume a miracle, if a miracle be necessary; but it is unphilosophical to originate the necessity itself.²⁵

The common sense philosophers, however, did not base their philosophical argument upon the supernatural agency of God, they simply admitted of its possibility. M. J. Ferreira defends Reid's position, arguing that his

reliance on natural belief is [...] neither supernaturally founded nor supernaturally motivated [...] [T]he divine authorship of our constitution is responsible for the functioning of our faculties – we are, for Reid, the workmanship of God – but we can come to know of that authorship only after we have trusted our faculties, so such trust cannot be epistemologically dependent on belief in God [...] Reid cannot be charged with the kind of circularity for which he criticised Descartes.²⁶

²³ Ralph Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought*, p. 100.

²⁴ S. A. Grave, *The Story of Scottish Philosophy*, p. 159.

²⁵ William Hamilton, *Discussions on Philosophy and Literature*, p. 68.

²⁶ M. Jamie Ferreira, *Scepticism and Reasonable Doubt: The British Naturalist Tradition in Wilkins, Hume, Reid and Newman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 122-3, 124.

In the common sense school's agnostic reply to Humean philosophy, Miller found an intelligent and post-enlightened response to modern scepticism which left room for the possibilities of his faith.

Given that Humean philosophy proposed that the most important aspect of knowledge was not the external world perceived, but the internal quality of perception, common sense further attacked Hume on the premise that his relationship of causation between impressions and ideas was false. In contrast with Hume's mechanistic view of mind, Reid advocated 'natural dualism': a fundamental *difference* in the nature of body and mind. According to Reid, a common perception, evidenced in every day language, revealed an ontological distinction between body (which is material) and mind (which is immaterial). This invalidated the assumption that mental events could be described using a mechanistic (material) paradigm of cause and effect. For Reid and Hamilton the inscrutable mind did not admit of enquiry, least of all in the form of hypotheses and false analogies. In a similar manner, Miller had argued for the rationality of the Christian doctrine by analysing the ontological components of the figure of Christ. The fitness of the Holy Trinity in appealing to the nature of man, Miller argued, was that Christ expressed both the fact of corporeal suffering, common to all humanity, as well the ethereal spirit of God. This binary of material and immaterial, of base humanity and divine spirit meant that man could identify with the human aspect of Christ and at the same time aspire to the transcendent qualities of the Godhead.²⁷ Reid's particular

²⁷ In his essay, 'A True Story of the Life of A Scotch Merchant of the Eighteenth Century', Miller expounded on the 'true religion' of Christianity. 'It is Christianity alone which unites the [popular appeal] of the one class [of religion] with the rationality, and more than purity of the other,- that gives to the Deity, as man, his strong hold on the human affections, and restores him, in his abstract manner as the Father of all, the homage of understanding.' (T&S, 370). In *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, he writes of Christianity's combination of 'the true Humanity and true Divinity of the Adorable Saviour – is a truth equally receivable by at once the humblest and the loftiest intellects. Poor dying children, possessed of but a few simple ideas, and men of the most robust intellects [...] find themselves equally able to rest their salvation on the *man* "Christ, who is all over, *God* blessed for ever"'. (S&S, 359)

dualistic vision has been usefully described as a 'duality held in unity'²⁸; an expression of the relationship between mind and matter that protected against a fatal atomisation of society. Moreover, as we have seen, Miller had utilised the logic of his geo-theology to guard against the alienating implications of Humean scepticism.²⁹ The protection of social integrity implied in common sense philosophy was fundamental to Miller's vision. The moral assurance of a shared belief in man-under-God not only guaranteed a society bound by a shared religious morality but for Miller Christian belief also possessed a crucial social function. As John Cooke has concluded in his study of the social teachings of Hugh Miller, 'Miller's social teaching [...] revealed as much far-sightedness as it did warm humanity. There certainly did not exist in his mind any antithesis between the 'social' and 'personal' aspects of religion [...] The social duties of Christians were a corollary of individual faith and not a substitute for that faith itself.'³⁰ In other words, the shared basis of faith was capable of preserving a society in danger of being fractured by individualistic philosophies.

There is a significant relationship, therefore, between the philosophy of the common sense school and Miller's own approach to community. As we have seen, the common sense philosophers feared that individual scepticism would demolish the notion of a shared experience and the whole basis of community. Reid and the common sense thinkers believed that man's essential nature provided a basis for community

²⁸ Ralph Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought*, p. 73.

²⁹ In the note 'To the Reader' in *Footprints of the Creator*, Miller warned that, 'there is a species of superstition which inclines men to take on trust whatever assumes the name of science [...] And owing mainly to the wide diffusion of this credulous spirit of the modern type [...] the development doctrines are doing much harm on both sides of the Atlantic, especially among intelligent mechanics, and a class of young men engaged in the subordinate departments of trade and the law. For it invariably happens, that when persons in these walks become materialists, they become also turbulent subjects and bad men. That belief in the existence after death, which forms the distinguishing instinct of humanity, is too essential a part of man's moral constitution not to be missed when away; and so, when once fairly eradicated, the life and conduct rarely fail to betray its absence.' (FC, pp. lxvi-lxvii)

³⁰ John Cooke, 'The Social Teachings of Hugh Miller' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 1977), pp. 335–356.

rather than separation.³¹ Just as all men shared a basic process of perception, so too did they share a desire for society, man being essentially communal. As Reid explains, 'It is obvious from the conduct of men in all ages, that man is by nature a social animal; that he delights to associate with his species; to converse and exchange good offices with them.'³² The exertion of the social affections, in Reid's opinion, is 'no less natural than the exertions of the powers that are solitary and selfish'.³³ Indeed, to Reid and the common sense philosophers it was the ethical quality of human benevolence which society particularly cultivated and which Reid described as 'medicinal both to soul and body'.³⁴ In a similar way Adam Ferguson argued that without society man could not act as a moral being. 'A person of affectionate mind, possessed of a maxim that he himself as an individual, is no more than a part of a whole that demands his regard, has found, in that principle, a sufficient foundation for all the virtues.'³⁵

Such principles were current in the basic social theories predominant in the industrial age. Adam Smith's theory of individualistic capitalist economics in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) was tempered by his moral theory of social sympathy as expressed in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).³⁶ By means of social sympathy, Smith advocated, men vicariously empathise with others and tend towards working for the common good. The common sense philosophers believed that social stability was maintained, not principally by strong government, but by the moral forces operative in society. Indeed, they opposed the radical notion that the hierarchical structure of

³¹ To this must be added the important caveat that Hume, in his essays was as interested in social questions and in man as a social being as the common sense philosophers. It was their interpretation of the end results of Humean scepticism which caused them to fear that his philosophy would result in the atomisation of community.

³² Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind*, I, 60.

³³ Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind*, I, 78.

³⁴ Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind*, III, 154.

³⁵ Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, p. 63.

³⁶ We now recognise that the significance of the Scottish philosophy has two aspects: Hutcheson and Reid in the theory of common sense and the more hard-headed Humean scepticism and Smith's theory of economic principles.

society, which they considered to be 'natural', should be altered. Instead, as Keith Costain describes:

They argued that social harmony in the modern world would be more likely to ensue if the rise of the individual up through the hierarchy were to depend on his personal talents, abilities, and achievements rather than upon the accidents of his birth.³⁷

There is a striking resemblance between this and the social theories which Miller propounded, perhaps deriving from their common allowance for the social authorship of the Divine. Like John Miller and Dugald Stewart, Miller was essentially optimistic about the progress of society, believing, from Evangelical doctrine, that man's purpose was an ever-ascending movement towards the perfection of Christ. Furthermore, his deeply held faith caused Miller to seek for progress not primarily in political stratagems but in spiritual development. Like Carlyle, Miller believed that a spiritual reformation must necessarily precede any political one in order to achieve real lasting social harmony and stability.³⁸ Above all, Miller valued the importance of tradition and community. His writings express a repeated desire for social unity and tolerance. In a reply to the Lamarckian theory that man evolved from a variety of species, Miller in a *Witness* essay utilised scripture to defend the 'Unity of the Human Races': 'Nay, so thoroughly is religion pledged to the unity of the species, that if all nations be not "made of one blood" there is, in the theological sense, neither first nor second Adam.'³⁹ It was from this that Miller was able to argue against the 'scientific'

³⁷ Keith Costain 'The Community of Man: Galt and the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Realism', *Scottish Literary Journal*, Vol. 8 No. 1 (May 1981), pp. 10 - 29 (p. 25).

³⁸ Just as Carlyle had lamented in *Signs of the Times*, 'The truth is, men have lost their belief in the Invisible, and believe, and hope, and work only in the Visible; or to speak it in other words: This is not a Religious Age [...] Our true Deity is Mechanism', so too Miller argued throughout his writing that the working classes required moral example prior to material aid. In 'Our Working Classes' for example, he wrote that, 'to promote the habit of providence in our working classes, it is not only necessary to exhibit a moral restriction which cautions them from going wrong, but to present a positive stimulus which induces them to go right.' In most cases, the positive stimulus was to be the socially concerned religion of Evangelicals such as Chalmers and Miller.

³⁹ Hugh Miller, 'The Unity of the Human Races' (*Witness*, 13 July 1850).

precedent for the assumption of a Caucasian supremacy over colonial slavery. In the same way, he argued that, by virtue of a common faith, a Presbyterian government could not legislate against the freedom of Catholic worship.⁴⁰

Miller's respect for the values of traditional community are everywhere evident in his writing, which repeatedly takes his native Cromarty and the traditional Highlands as its subject. Indeed, Miller's very support for the protection of Highland culture lay in his valuation of the virtuous qualities of community displayed by the Gaels. In his rhetorical essay, 'Sutherland As It Was And Is or How A Country May be Ruined', Miller argued for the value and integrity of the traditional community. Deferring to the empirical arguments of the French physicist, Jean-Baptiste Biot, recently arrived from the disruptions of the French Revolution, Miller utilised his account to furnish a sympathetic comparison with the peaceable Highland community. Miller writes:

The state of trustful security in which he found the simple inhabitants filled [Biot] with astonishment. "Here", he exclaimed, "during the twenty-five years in which Europe has been devouring herself, the door of the house I inhabit has remained open day and night." The whole interior of Sutherland was, at the time of which we write, in a similar condition. It did not surprise us that the old man, a person of deep piety, regularly assembled his household night and morning for the purpose of family worship, and led in their devotions: we had seen many such instances in the low country. But it did somewhat surprise us to find the practise universal in the parish. In every family had the worship of God been set up. One could not pass an inhabited cottage in the evening, from which the voice of psalms was not to be heard.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Despite his staunch Presbyterianism (which could often betray signs of an anti-Papal prejudice), Miller avowed his support for the Catholic Relief Bill, as here in *My Schools and Schoolmasters*: 'The few individuals who kept aloof were chiefly lads of an extra-liberal turn, devoid, like most extreme politicians, of the ordinary ecclesiastical sympathies of their country folk; and as I cultivated no acquaintance with them, and was more ecclesiastical than political in my leanings, I had the satisfaction of finding myself, in opposition to all my friends, on the Catholic Relief measure, in a respectable minority of one [...] With the two great facts of the Irish Union and the Irish Church before me, I could not petition against Roman Catholic Emancipation. I felt too, that were I myself a Roman Catholic, I would listen to no Protestant argument until what I held to be justice had first been done'. (S&S, 453)

⁴¹ Hugh Miller, 'Sutherland As It Was And Is or How a Country May be Ruined' (*The Witness* 16, 23, 26, 30 August and 6, 9 September 1843).

Miller describes the intellectual activity, the labour and leisure as well as the devotions of this small parish in order to furnish a depiction of a harmonious community threatened by the ignorance and greed of a disinterested and distant feudal system of land ownership.

Nevertheless, Miller did recognise the place of self-interest in the progress of society. In essays such as 'George Ross, the Scotch Agent' and 'A True Story of the Life of A Scotch Merchant of the Eighteenth-Century', Miller congratulated the efforts of the entrepreneur in improving the overall condition of society. What he rejected was the kind of selfish feudalism represented by those such as the Duke of Sutherland, who displayed no social sympathy for the existence of the people living under their so-called protection. In articles such as 'Sutherland As It Was And Is', 'The Cottages of Our Hinds' and 'The Bothy System', Miller attacked the neglectful landowner. 'We never heard the name of the farmer mentioned among his servants without some accompanying expression of dislike [...] What we would fain have said to him [...] may not be without its use to others now. "You, in your utter selfishness, have spoiled the men whom you employ [...] and men, when they are spoiled, spoil all other things."'”⁴² The common sense philosophers believed that progress was impossible without order and part of their philosophical intention was in rooting a secure principle of social order in the innate workings of human nature. Self-interest, however, was an inadequate basis for social order in that it expressed only a partial (and unsympathetic) aspect of human behaviour.

That men were self interested the [common sense] Realists, of course, recognised; that men were only self-interested they were by no means prepared to accept. They found men capable also of benevolence, and it was in the *balance* of

⁴² Hugh Miller, 'The Bothy System' (*The Witness*, 22 September 1841). 'The Cottages of Our Hinds' (*The Witness*, 2 January 1842);

self-interest with benevolence that the Scottish Realists found their principle of social order.⁴³

This approach accurately expresses Miller's own attitude to social relations. Miller recognised the place of self-interest in his advocacy of the self-made man. Indeed, it was his belief that the self-improvement of the labouring classes would gradually extend into the general elevation of society. However, as we have seen, Miller did not propose a radical upheaval of the existing social order. His political approach centred on the notions of a benevolent aristocracy and the gradual achievement of an intellectual and moral meritocracy. In a letter to Miss Dunbar of Boath, one of Miller's wealthy, local patrons, he wrote enthusiastically: 'I have often said to myself, Give men an aristocracy of Miss Dunbars, and we shall have no Revolution for a century to come.'⁴⁴ In his essay on 'The Scotch Merchant of the Eighteenth Century', Miller praised the benevolence and industriousness of the entrepreneur and the good proprietor.

The only trade in the country was that originated and carried on by Mr Forsyth, and its only manufacture the linen one which he superintended. In this state of things, it was the part assigned to him [...] to revolutionize and give spirit to the whole; and such was his untiring and statesman-like sagacity, that he fully succeeded [...] Did he meet with a young man of promising talent, however poor, who belonged in any degree to the aristocracy of nature, and bade fair to rise above his present level, he was sure of being invited to his table. Did he come in contact with some unfortunate aspirant who had seen better days, but who, in his fall, had preserved his character, he was certain of being invited too.⁴⁵

There are two important points to note here. First, there is Miller's conception of the benevolent leader or patron in matters of government and, second, his allusion to the 'aristocracy of nature' which partakes of both an intellectual and a moral quality, and

⁴³ Keith Costain, 'The Community of Man: Galt and the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Realism', *Scottish Literary Journal*, Vol. 8 No. 1 (May 1981), p. 21.

⁴⁴ Hugh Miller, letter to Miss Dunbar of Boath, LB82 (14 February 1834).

⁴⁵ Hugh Miller 'A True Story of the Life of A Scotch Merchant of the Eighteenth Century' in *Tales and Sketches*, pp. 335, 345.

which qualifies man for a place of authority and respect in the social order. In the same way, the Scottish common sense philosophers argued that social harmony in contemporary society could arise only from the ascent of the individual through the social structure by virtue of his personal qualities and achievements rather than through the accident of his birth. For Miller too, social harmony in modern urban society was dependent on two crucial factors: the strengthening of religious ethics and a universal system of popular education.

There are, therefore, several features of Miller's thinking that ally him to the philosophy of common sense. His rejection of Humean scepticism was based on the assumption shared by Reid and Hamilton that the 'solitary subjectivity' of Hume's idealistic school could only lead to an individualistic atomisation of society. The values of the common sense philosophers tended towards community and social order, much as Miller's own writing advocates. Furthermore, both Miller and the common sense philosophers share a conception of social philosophy, which allows for the informed participation of the 'everyman' member of society. Both Miller and the philosophers rejected the notion that social arrangements were informed by metaphysical speculation, arguing for shared, practical and down-to-earth notions about the way human nature and society operated. Perhaps surprisingly, part of that practical agenda included an allowance for the unknowable universe. For the common sense philosophers, it was an agnostic admission that philosophy could not prove the absence of the Divine hand, an acknowledgement which simply amounted to a humble recognition of man's ultimate ignorance in the face of existence. For Miller, it was simply an attestation of faith.

Even if Miller did not consciously ally himself to the Scottish philosophy of common sense, there is sufficient reference to their works and ideas in his writing to

attest his assent to their philosophical approach in reply to the threat of Humean scepticism and infidelity.⁴⁶ For a man as intellectually engaged as Miller, living and working in the Scottish capital, it would have been impossible not to have come into contact with the dominant ideas of the Scottish school in their vociferous reply to the philosophy of Hume. Even with only a few direct references to the members of the Scottish school and their thinking in Miller's writing, it is nevertheless possible to recognise a degree of debt to this important Scottish philosophy in the shaping of Miller's own social ethics. By contextualising him in this way, it is possible to provide a tentative resolution to the apparent paradox between Miller's devout Evangelical faith and his moderate, pragmatic and intellectual liberalism in social affairs.

The Disruption of Intellectual Accord: Evangelicism and the Crisis of 1847

In Miller's eclectic synthesis of views the matters of faith and philosophy were critical, not only to his personal understanding of the world, but in defining his place within the confrontation and collapse of Scottish intellectual culture in the nineteenth century.⁴⁷ After emerging as a powerful and influential philosophical counter to Hume during the Scottish Enlightenment, common sense philosophy in the nineteenth century faced the increasing threat of a growing Evangelicism. The democratic ideals of this new and fervent branch of Presbyterianism had the potential to usurp the populism of common

⁴⁶ In *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, Miller recorded that he had read Reid and George Campbell, (*S&S*, 389) and his recollections on 'The Late William Hamilton' in *The Witness*, 9 August, 1851, and on 'Dugald Stewart' in *The Witness* 26 August 1854 show a profound respect for the philosophers' thinking. His later article 'The Idealistic School' in *The Witness* of 1856 attests his rejection of Hume in favour of the common sense philosophers. The only commentator to have recognised the influence of common sense philosophy upon Miller has been W. M. Mackenzie in 1905, who wrote: 'the Scottish Philosophers [... Miller] believed, [were] destined ultimately "to give law in the region of mental philosophy" when Hume's "moonshine of sceptical philosophy" had gone the way of all such illusion. To which it may be answered that Reid's metaphysical enthronement of "the divine inspiration of the common sense," so fitted to Miller's cast of mind held sway.' (Mackenzie, pp. 85-86).

⁴⁷ In my attempt to investigate the particular conditions of Miller's own (religious and humanistic) relationship to the intellectual climate of the period I am particularly indebted to George Elder Davie's work in his seminal study, *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and Her Universities in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1961).

sense philosophy. James McCosh, in his *History of the Scottish Philosophy*, has indicated the challenge which the academic philosophers faced from the Evangelicals in responding to the immediate concerns of the people:

At the very time when the Scottish metaphysicians were discoursing so beautifully of moral virtue, there was a population springing up around their very colleges in Edinburgh and Glasgow, sunk in vice and degradation, which appalled the good men of the next age – the age of Chalmers [...] and which is not to be arrested by any remedy which the mere philosophic moralists have propounded [...] [T]he institutions which aim at lessening the sin and misery of the outcast and degraded – such as missions, ragged schools and reformatories – have proceeded from very different influences; and a philosophy embracing the fact which they contemplate, must dive deeper into human nature, and probe its actual condition more faithfully, than the academic moralists of Scotland ever ventured to do.⁴⁸

McCosh, it may be noted, was a minister in the Scottish Church, and his sympathy with its social teachings are not discredited by his own avowed commitment to common sense philosophy. Yet his words indicate a perceived failing in the relative responses of academic philosophy and Christian engagement. Philosophy could be attacked as merely discoursing on the human dilemma, whereas the Church claimed to offer the solution to immediate suffering.

Davie, in his analysis of the Scottish philosophy, further illustrates the ‘formidable danger to philosophy’ posed by the ‘Evangelical challenge’.⁴⁹ When Chalmers proposed to reform the philosophy teaching in the Scottish Universities, his intention was to replace aspects of the then ‘mental sciences’ in the Chair of Moral Philosophy with the instruction of political economy and jurisprudence. This was so as to enable ‘the Universities to cope better with the problem of restating the Evangel in terms of industrial society.’⁵⁰ Yet despite the threats of institutional change in altering

⁴⁸ James McCosh, *The Scottish Philosophy, Biographical, Expository, Critical, From Hutcheson to Hamilton* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1875), p. 299.

⁴⁹ George Davie, *The Democratic Intellect*, p. 266.

⁵⁰ George Davie, *The Democratic Intellect*, pp. 266-7.

the establishment of intellectual culture, it was as much Evangelicism's wish to re-establish itself as the original democratic mindset which posed the most fundamental challenge to the philosophy of common sense. The roots of Scottish philosophy, as Davie and McCosh argue, actually lay in the democratic ideals of the Reformation and Scottish Presbyterianism. If Evangelicism was the theological outgrowth of that early struggle, then common sense was its sister in philosophy.

The intellectual liberalism of the great Evangelical leader, Thomas Chalmers (who studied under Dugald Stewart in Edinburgh), at first accepted a preliminary common ground between the schools of theology and philosophy. As Davie has conceded:

Under the intellectual influence of Chalmers, [...] the Evangelicals, even in their most extreme period, were already aware, in some degree, of the need for "adaptation to contemporary exigencies and ideas", particularly of a scientific sort, e.g. in Geology.

In the field of philosophy proper, the awareness of the necessity for an intellectual defence of Evangelism would apparently express itself, if hard pressed, in a tendency to sympathise with sophisticated versions of irrationalism. We hear that a study of Pascal helped to bring Chalmers over from Moderatism to Evangelicism. In the controversies among the Irish Presbyterians between 1830 and 1835, the Evangelical leader, also a man trained at a Scottish University, had recourse to tactics which – in the words of his opponents – "out-Humes Hume" [...] Evangelicism thus tended towards a metaphysical scepticism, but in the temperate climate of the Scottish capital, it did not carry its irrationalism too far, and made its peace with the philosophy of common sense.⁵¹

Even James Ferrier, the great rationalist of the common-sense school accepted this compromise:

Ferrier's position developed into a revived moderatism anxious at once to leave room for evangelicism, and to vindicate independence for philosophy. Both men stood for the sanity of *via media*.⁵²

⁵¹ George Davie, *The Democratic Intellect*, p. 270.

⁵² George Davie, *The Democratic Intellect*, pp. 268-9.

A temporary peace was affected between Evangelicism and common sense philosophy under Chalmers's leadership of the religious party. Indeed, the history of the common sense school was of a Moderate extraction. Hutcheson, Reid, and Dugald Stewart were all the sons of Presbyterian ministers and followed careers in the ministry, but with an inclination towards the intellectual liberalism of the Moderates that saw each of them take the path to academic Philosophy.⁵³ This moderate inheritance was to have a significant impact on the nature of the philosophical school. It meant that these philosophers had common grounds with the values of Presbyterian theology. And perhaps more importantly, there was much in Chalmers's thinking that retained elements of Moderate theology. Aside from his intellectual training, his leadership inclined towards balance and accord, and resisted the trend towards fierce partisanship which would characterise the Evangelical movement in the late 1840s. What defined Chalmers's Evangelicism was a committed belief in the independent sovereignty of the Church, and her necessary independence from state interference, as guaranteed by the 1707 Act of Union. Chalmers was not a disestablishment man by principle. His social theology (in projects such as the St John's experiment) reveals the importance in his thinking of a benevolent, paternalistic state, in a nineteenth century of renewed communal and spiritual values. His vision was one of profound unity, of a moral aristocracy working to the benefit of a labouring and self-serving poor. Chalmers's advocacy of the 1843 Disruption of the Established Church was one of necessity, not principle.

In all matters theological, Miller was an Evangelical in the mould of Thomas Chalmers. Several of his articles reveal his profound admiration for the man, his benevolent social vision and liberal theology. Just as Goethe might be described as

⁵³ See James McCosh, *The Scottish Philosophy*, for biographical details of Hutcheson, Reid and Stewart.

Carlyle's spiritual father so too might we regard Chalmers as Miller's. In a series of articles, entitled 'The Educational Question,' written three years after Chalmers's death and in defence of their shared belief in a policy of non-denominational education, Miller explicitly took the authority of Chalmers in defence of his argument. Introducing the article with a transcript of Chalmers's own paper on the subject, Miller opens his argument:

At first we regarded it as a matter of wonder that such discussion should have arisen [within the Free Church]; for we had held that there was really little room for difference respecting the meaning of Chalmers,- a man whose nature it was to deal with broad truths, not with little distinctions; and who always had the will, and certainly did not lack the ability, of making himself thoroughly understood. We have since thought, however, that as there is nothing which has once occurred that might not occur again, what happened to the writings of Jansenius might well happen to one of the writings of Chalmers; and further, that from certain conversation which we had held with the illustrious deceased a few months before his death, on the subject of his paper, and from certain facts in our possession regarding his views, we had spectacles through which to look at the document in question, and a key to his meaning, which most of the disputants wanted. The time has at length come when these helps to the right understanding of so great an authority should be no longer withheld from the public.⁵⁴

In every way, Thomas Chalmers represented to Miller the integrity of Evangelicism.

From a cultural point of view, as Davie has argued, common sense philosophy offered a crucial continuity by which the Scottish culture of the nineteenth century might resist some of the anglicising tendencies of the period and combat British uniformity by maintaining a native intellectual tradition. As the integrity of a distinctive Scottish intellectual tradition was being increasingly undermined in the period after the 1826 Royal Commission on the state of national education, Miller's was one of the few voices to argue in favour of the retention of a characteristic Scots education, under a system of reform as advocated by James Lorimer's Association for Extension of the Scottish Universities. With the suspension of the enactment of the 1826 Commission

⁵⁴ Hugh Miller, 'The Educational Question' (*The Witness*, 13, 16, 23, 27 February, 2, 9, 16 March, 1850).

(which recommended significant concessions towards an English model of education), all bade well for the maintenance of this crucial Scottish estate. Davie's thesis centres on the contention that the protection of the national education of Scotland, guaranteed in the Act of Union, was crucial to maintaining a distinctive, vital and independent intellectual national culture:

In education, especially, the two countries [Scotland and England], continued to develop in independence of one another, and it would not be too much to say that, during the century following the Union, the educational system of Scotland became more and more unlike that of England, at the very time when, in all other respects, the country was becoming increasingly anglicised [...] It was only very slowly and reluctantly, however, that [the Scots] brought themselves to compromise with their traditional principles, and the sixty-years long struggle which preceded their final surrender in 1890 did much, perhaps, to induce the paralysis of intellectual life associated with Victorian Scotland.⁵⁵

Even Miller conceded, in an 1855 *Witness* article on 'Our Scottish Universities,' that it was the divisive effects of the 1843 Disruption that diverted the national interest from the cause of University reform, which might, under Lorimer's recommendations have maintained the pillar of the Scottish educational estate in supporting an autonomous national culture.⁵⁶ As it was, the effects of the Disruption were damaging, both for Miller and for Scotland.

If common sense philosophy and Evangelicism had made peace under Chalmers and in the social and intellectual vision of *The Witness* under Miller, then, ironically, it was a peace to be broken shortly after the Evangelicals realised their goal of disestablishment in 1843. In the last year of Chalmers's life, Robert Candlish inherited

⁵⁵ George Davie, *The Democratic Intellect*, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Lorimer's main reform principles were; the prioritisation of Scottish University over school reform, the retention of distinctive programmes of Scots law teaching, the creation of postgraduate departments for scholarly specialisation in arts and sciences (based on the German model), that Scottish education be guided by Continental rather than English developments and that the Scottish pedagogical bias towards general ideas and philosophical culture be maintained. In a review of Lorimer's publication of *Scottish Universities, Past, Present and Possible* (1855), Miller praised Lorimer's 'succinct and intelligible' discussion of 'an important subject' and conceded that the effects of the Disruption had obscured the force of the campaign. 'Our Scottish Universities' (*The Witness*, 3 January 1855).

the leadership of the Free Church. His was to be a radically different vision from that of Chalmers. His intention was to create a powerful Evangelical Free Church and to preach the Evangelical message was his singular aim. Increasingly, the values of intellectual liberalism and concord were undermined. In that same year, Candlish staged his first offensive against the intellectual and ideological autonomy of the Free Church *Witness* newspaper and its outspoken editor, Hugh Miller. With Miller having returned to work after one of his periodic bouts of depression, Candlish took the opportunity of Miller's personal fragility to strike at his professional authority. He addressed a letter to the Free Church *Witness* Committee recommending that Miller's editorial powers be significantly reduced by appointing a sub-editor with a proprietary (and thus controlling) role and one with profitable Parliamentary Whig connections.

Shortly after the Disruption, the Free Church had gone about strengthening their old allegiances to the Whig Party. This somewhat cynical alliance ensured that the Free Church could offer its considerable support to Whig elections whilst the Whigs would, in turn, ensure the protection of Free Church interests in government. Candlish perceived Miller's control of *The Witness* as threateningly heterodox. With the greatest part of the newspaper's output being penned by Miller himself, the ecclesiastic organ had, over the seven years of Miller's editorship, come to express commentary upon subjects as diverse as astrology and literature and as controversial as Catholic emancipation and anti-slavery. Candlish wanted a more obedient editor, one submissive to the requirements of the Free Church, who would promote Party interests and propagate a strictly doctrinal message. Miller was outraged at Candlish's proposal. He promptly penned a reply addressed to Candlish and the senior leaders of the Free Church, defending his position and stating his commitment to the aims of *The Witness* newspaper as well as his total rejection of political partisanship within the Free Church:

My faults no doubt have been many; but they have not been faults of principle; nor have they lost me the confidence of that portion of the people of Scotland to which I belong and which I represent. And possessing their confidence, I do not now feel myself justified in retiring from my post. Dr Candlish and his Parliament-House friends are not the ministers and the people of the Free Church of Scotland; nor do I recognise the expression of the Doctor's will in this matter as a call to me in Providence to divest myself of my office, in order that the Free Church may be made the subject of a centralizing experiment, or that the Free Church itself may be laid open to the temporising influences of the Parliament House [...] It might be all quite well that Dr Candlish should keep me right; but pray, who is to keep right Dr Candlish? [...] Permit me to state further, that if there is to be an open war between Dr Candlish and me, it must be open war.⁵⁷

In Bayne's account of the 1847 incident, he records that, in responding to Miller's impassioned reply to Candlish's proposals, Thomas Chalmers had supported Miller's position, reputedly challenging the Free Church committee with the words, 'Which of you could direct Hugh Miller?'⁵⁸ But Thomas Chalmers died on 31 May 1847, leaving the dissension to rumble on between Miller and Candlish. Miller was increasingly isolated from the Free Church after 1847 and he began gradually to retreat from ecclesiastical affairs and to concentrate his energies on his literary and scientific projects.

The 1840s were a difficult period for the Scottish intellectual tradition. The position of the Scottish school of common sense philosophy was itself in a vulnerable situation as the Free Church entered into an increasingly powerful alliance with the Whigs. With Sir William Hamilton fading into old age, his natural successor was James Ferrier, the rationalist inheritor of the common sense school. However, after the Disruption and increasingly upon the death of Chalmers, the Evangelicals became more and more jealous of their own authority, becoming insular and increasingly astringent

⁵⁷ 'Letter from Hugh Miller, editor of the "Witness"' reprinted in full in Bayne, II, 290-291. The letter was addressed and sent to Dr Thomas Chalmers, Dr Robert Gordon, Dr R. S. Candlish, Dr William Cunningham, Dr James Buchanan, The Rev. Thomas Guthrie, The Rev. John Bruce, The Rev. James Begg, The Rev. Andrew Gray of Perth, The Rev. Alexander Stewart of Cromarty, Alexander Dunlop Esq., Robert Paul Esq., J.G Wood Esq. and James Blackadder Esq.

⁵⁸ Thomas Chalmers, quoted in Bayne, II, 296.

in clinging to the Knoxian ideals of the Presbyterian inheritance. In his study of the decline of the democratic intellect, Davie is damning about the effects of post-Disruption theology:

As the result of the forces and feelings let loose by the Disruption of 1843, the irrationalist Evangelical faction was now in control. The passionate atmosphere of the two Disruption decades had weakened the checks on Evangelical influence, and in particular the philosophically sophisticated clerics [...] had begun to move away from the cause of Moderation [...] In fact, the lurid 'glow of the Disruption' was parching the land, and in its heat there had faded the fine quality of moderation hitherto associated with Scottish academical debate.⁵⁹

In the Universities, Evangelical wrangling was demonstrated, most significantly in 1852, when the Edinburgh Chair of Moral Philosophy previously held by John Wilson ('Christopher North') was open to re-appointment. James Ferrier stood as the favoured candidate against the lesser-known P. C. MacDougall. But the latter was an Evangelical and the religious Party did their best to influence nominations so as to achieve an appointment with an Evangelical bias. One former common sense philosopher and a recent convert to Evangelicalism, John Cairns, illustrated the contention between the two schools of thought, theological and philosophic, in a public letter to Hamilton in which he attacked common sense school's 'neutral' agnosticism:

In your hands, Ethical science, so often and so obstinately dissociated from the Christian revelation, would be preserved from grievous injury. I am well aware, that you do not go all my length in regard to the extent to which the Ethics of Christianity should be taught as a substantial part of the philosophical curriculum. In my opinion, the Christian sentiment of the country is fully entitled to make itself respected on a vital point like this, where neutrality is impossible, and the profession of a snare and a delusion.⁶⁰

Evangelicism appeared to gain where philosophy failed because the common sense school would not avow the existence of God and the Absolute Truth of Christian ethics.

⁵⁹ George Davie, *The Democratic Intellect*, pp. 290, 297.

⁶⁰ John Cairns, quoted in George Davie, *The Democratic Intellect*, pp. 291-2.

Their agnostic concession to human nescience and the scrupulously qualified academic acceptance of inherent spiritual intuition in matters of belief, their critics claimed, was nothing more than weak neutrality. Cairns's words reveal a revival of that old rivalry for popular confidence that had been eschewed by the moderatism of Thomas Chalmers. If Chalmers had represented a leadership of intellectual liberality and theological openness, then Candlish headed a Free Church that was increasingly jealous of its power and exacting in its beliefs. The Chair of Moral Philosophy went to MacDougall, much to the shock and outrage of Hamilton, Ferrier and the academic community at large. 'In the last professorial election', Hamilton thundered, 'the Edinburgh academical patronage has reached the lowest level of subsidisation; religious parties now co-operate with secular corruption in seducing the incompetent elector to violate his duties'.⁶¹ The same events would take place in the nominations for Hamilton's vacancy in the Chair of Moral Philosophy in 1856, when Ferrier was ousted by the lesser known, but more moderate, common sense philosopher Alexander Campbell Fraser. At that time Ferrier was undoubtedly one of Scotland's most articulate and influential philosophers after Hume. Yet his increasing alienation from the academic sphere saw him retreat into a personal and professional bitterness which had the sadly ironic effect of his turning against his own philosophical school. In the 1850s Ferrier increasingly replied to Evangelical readings of Scottish philosophy by reacting against the 'intuitivist' school of Reid and Hamilton, which left the philosophy open to Christian and, especially (given its democratic emphasis), Presbyterian interpretation and subsidisation. Ferrier responded with a vigorously rational reading of common sense philosophy, but in his interrogation of the intuitivist school critics began to read Ferrier's later works as a retraction from and against common sense philosophy

⁶¹ Sir William Hamilton, quoted in George Davie, *The Democratic Intellect*, p. 292.

itself. In a most ironic turn of events, Evangelicism was viewed as an ally of common sense philosophy and Ferrier its bitter opponent. Arguably, the reverse was true. Had Ferrier been able to uphold the common sense philosophy in the national Universities then the slow dilution of intellectual vitality and individuality might never have weakened the Universities to the point where the 1858 Royal Commission was, largely able to assimilate the Scots education system into an anglified British model.

Unfortunately, with Miller speculating less and less on the affairs of the Free Church after 1847, it is impossible to know what he might have made, for example, of the Evangelical interference in University appointments. However, his writing does express an impassioned rejection of denominational considerations in education. In his article on 'The Educational Question' in 1850, Miller replied to the Free Church proposals for a system of Evangelical parish schools and argued for the total abolition of denominational considerations. Instead, he advocated a non-sectarian education system open to all regardless of class or creed, asserting that 'the better Scottish people will on no account or consideration sacrifice the secular education of their children to the dream of a spiritual pedagogy'.⁶²

Miller had suffered at the hands of narrow Evangelicism in much the same way as Ferrier and common sense philosophy. Together, their writing represented a vital, critical and humane voice in Scottish intellectual culture: the philosopher of equality, reason and force and the religious writer of humanity, independence and intelligence. Such qualities were increasingly suppressed by the rise of an aggressive and narrow Evangelical factionalism. From 1847 onwards we find Miller's *Witness* articles increasingly removed from Church affairs and instead focusing on the need for a 'democratic intellect', for equality of access and the need for autonomous voices to

⁶² Hugh Miller, 'The Educational Question' (*The Witness*, 16 February, 1850).

arise from amidst the people and challenge the status quo, in a socio-literary agenda that has much in common with the aims of the common sense school. Outside of the academic confrontation, it is worth recalling that numerous critics have identified the damaging effects of the Disruption upon Scotland's creative output as a whole in the decades of 1840 – 1850.⁶³ In 1854 Miller's *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, the last of his writing to be published whilst he was alive, articulated a profound critique of the intellectual establishment in a book that expresses the wisdom of plain experience, self-directed learning and an intuitive relationship to God and community. In this, Miller's final statement, he attacked some of the most basic tenets of the doctrinaire, authoritarian Evangelicists as well as the sceptical, and increasingly atomistic culture of nineteenth-century society.

An understanding of Miller's relationship with the influential Scottish philosophy of common sense and its reply to the sceptical rationalism of David Hume goes some way towards explaining how Miller resolved his own Evangelical principles with the philosophical debates of the time. His was not, nor ever could have been, a fanatical faith. His religion comprised a personal belief in the benevolence of God and the possibility for man to raise himself from his most basic nature to the image of the divine. Outspoken and often controversial in his *Witness* writings in defence of the Evangelical cause, Miller was nevertheless motivated by no doctrinaire or partisan prejudice. His guiding influence in religious affairs was the paternalistic figure of Thomas Chalmers whose thinking was characterised by a lively engagement in the world of literature, science and social affairs. Like his, Miller's religion was far from disengaged. Inspired by the belief in a Father Deity, Miller viewed the Church as

⁶³ These criticisms are discussed in full in the thesis 'Introduction'.

possessing an inherent paternalistic duty in the protection and improvement of the suffering and neglected. Where his religious beliefs touch with the tenets of common sense philosophy we find Miller's distinguishing values of egalitarianism, empiricism, intellectual equality, self-improvement, faith, order and social progress. It is ironic then that those principles of material and religious ethics, which Miller held in such profound synthesis, should have fared so badly in post-Disruption Scotland. The intensity of religious feeling which governed that period in Scottish history all but obliterated the last efforts to maintain a distinctive Scottish intellectual tradition whilst the impact of religious and institutional schism undermined national creative confidence. The native values of pragmatism, logical enquiry and moderation were drowned out in the increasingly dogmatic temper of Scottish Evangelicism after 1843. It was in this climate of heated partisanship that Hugh Miller, and the liberal, independent agenda of *The Witness*, faced attack. After 1847, Miller was increasingly isolated from the leadership of the Free Church. Dr Robert Buchanan's authoritative account of the Non-Intrusion struggle, published in 1849, made no reference at all to Hugh Miller's massive contribution to the establishment of the Scottish Free Church.⁶⁴ In his article on Hugh Miller and the Free Church, Donald MacLeod concludes that:

After the Disruption, there was no story but the clerical one, and Miller never managed to enter it. This contempt from the Church he had loved and done so much to foster probably had far more to do with Miller's depression than the reason usually given, namely, his reflections on the interface between science and religion. The [controversies] left even such towering clerics as William Cunningham utterly dejected. It must have taken an even heavier toll of Miller, whose isolation was virtually complete.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Dr Robert Buchanan, *The Ten Years Conflict: Being the History of the Disruption of the Church of Scotland*, 2 vols (Glasgow: Blackie, 1849).

⁶⁵ Donald MacLeod, 'Hugh Miller, the Disruption and the Free Church of Scotland in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above), pp. 187 – 205, p. 204.

That Miller never achieved literary centrality or the critical endorsement of the Edinburgh *literati* might have been expected. As editor of the people's Free Church newspaper, however, Miller had achieved a valuable union of literary expression with socio-political and theological engagement. That his importance, both as a writer and social commentator, has been forgotten in contemporary criticism is, at least in part, the result of the critical disregard of the Free Church for the man that did so much to popularise their cause. It is a fitting postscript to the tragic ending of this significant and neglected writer that in the famous portrait of 'The Signing of the Deed of Demission' by Miller's close friend David Octavius Hill, Hugh Miller sits in the foreground scribbling notes on the cause of the Scottish Church. At his feet are scattered flowers, as if to lay testimony and apology to the neglect of one of Scotland's most powerful and prophetic voices.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ For this interpretation of the painting, I am indebted to Sara Stevenson's paper 'Hugh Miller in Focus: The Art of Hill and Adamson' in *Hugh Miller in Context*, (see Borley, above), pp. 72-80. For a reprint for the painting, 'The Signing of the Deed of Demission', see Appendix B, plate 6.

Conclusion

The life and work of Hugh Miller expresses a sustained gesture towards various kinds of syntheses. But Miller's negotiation of class roles, of cultural positions and of confrontations in the fields of science, philosophy and religion have been critically misinterpreted as a fraught project to unify disparate and irresolvable philosophical tensions.

From the nineteenth century onwards critics have gone as far as to attribute Miller's eventual suicide to an ultimate failure in his vision of the world. Peter Bayne's biographic portrayal of Mrs Harriet Miller and the supernatural tradition in which Hugh Miller had been raised planted the suggestion that Miller's mind had been unhinged early in his youth by the effects of morbid and irrational beliefs which, ultimately, he was unable to resolve with his rationalistic, scientific researches. Then, in an article in the *London Quarterly Review* Bayne concluded that Miller's 'scientific writings are throughout coloured by the necessity he felt himself under to guard his theological position. Every chapter is a new battery set up against infidelity [...] It is clear that his superstitions and his early scepticisms had a good deal to do with the dogged tenacity to which he latterly clung to the main doctrines of the Calvinist theology. To the end we see him guarding against their re-emergence. He has resolved to subdue them at all hazards.'¹ An influential biographer, Bayne's accounts infer that Miller struggled to resolve his traditional beliefs, his religion and his scientific impulses. Later accounts appear to have been influenced by Bayne's interpretations. Thomas Brown's biography, *Labour and Triumph*, blamed Miller's death upon the mental exhaustion contingent upon Miller's battle to resolve science and religion in

¹ Peter Bayne in the *London Quarterly Review*, No. 54, 1871, pp. 76 – 109, (p. 108).

Testimony of the Rocks, the book on which he was working at the time of his suicide. In 1905, W. M. Mackenzie, borrowed from Bayne's vilification of Miller's mother, describing 'a woman of highly neurotic constitution, abnormally sensitive to supernatural suggestion and the like' and implied that her unhealthy influence had fatally marked Miller's mind 'so that, when the break-down came, the resurrected hags and witches of his boyhood rode the captive brain to its death'.² More recently, George Rosie attributed Miller's breakdown to his battles between scientific rationale and religious faith while Neal Ascherson, who wrote the introduction to Rosie's *Outrage and Order*, similarly described Miller as a 'tragic intellectual hero' who 'volunteered to cover God's retreat, to hold off as long as possible the encroaching armies of scientific materialism.'³ Stewart Conn's *Hugh Miller: A One-Man Play*, inspired by reading Rosie's *Outrage and Order*,⁴ interprets Miller's final hours, prior to his suicide, as an agonising internal debate between the truths of science and religion. Shortland, as we have seen, attributed Miller's final breakdown to unresolved sexual tensions. David Vincent's discussion of Miller refers to Bayne's comments upon the tensions between his scientific and religious beliefs, while David Alston, in his analysis of Miller's folkloric writing, concludes that Miller 'was driven to suicide by a [supernatural] tale become too real.'⁵ Notably, scientific commentators are more reticent in their conclusions. David Oldroyd concedes that, 'Miller's great effort to reconcile his science and his religion [...] just possibly contributed to his psychiatric problems.'⁶ James Paradis is more conclusive, if somewhat abstruse in his

² W. M. Mackenzie, *Hugh Miller: A Critical Study*, p. 8.

³ Neal Ascherson, 'Introduction' in George Rosie, *Outrage and Order*, pp. 9-11, (p.10).

⁴ This information is taken from programme notes to the 2002 performance. *Hugh Miller: A One-Man Play* was first produced in 1988 but has never been published.

⁵ David Alston, 'The Fallen Meteor: Hugh Miller and Local tradition' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above), p. 226.

⁶ David Oldroyd, 'The Geologist from Cromarty' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above), p. 110.

closing statement. 'Miller's epistemological conflicts were, I think, brought on by his efforts to make his metaphor of aesthetic intervention and decay a literal physical force.'⁷

Critics have misinterpreted Miller in assuming that the many sides of his complex literary persona reflect only division, conflict and paradox. Rather than evidence of a fractured and paradoxical mind, a comprehensive analysis of Miller's literary career reveals a confident and self-conscious negotiation of conflicting cultural and class positions and a body of work concerned to bridge the gulfs of social, philosophical and religious confrontation that characterise the period in which he lived.

Miller's self-styled literary persona, the 'Cromarty stonemason', represents a self-conscious attempt to retain a vernacular, working-class identity whilst appealing to the literary values of contemporary Romanticism and the post-Burnsian fascination with the rustic 'peasant poet'. It articulated his role as a man of letters at the same time that it signalled his identification with the working man, a composite role that Miller successfully sustained throughout his career. Having effectively utilised the figure of the Cromarty stonemason to attract literary patronage, the beginning years of Miller's career reveal a conspicuous search to realise a literary voice of authority. An examination of his literary progress from early experimentations in poetry, fiction and folklore to polemical prose reveals a developing maturity and confidence. Miller's early works suggest the anxiety of the amateur writer. The poetry is constrained by a

⁷ James Paradis, 'The Natural Historian as Antiquary of the World' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above). Sadly, the new papers presented at the 2000-2003 Conferences on Hugh Miller made little reference to these issues or the subject of Miller's death. The 'Summary of Discussion' on the Symposium on Geology and Natural History does, however, conclude, somewhat limply, that 'various papers touched on the apparent contradictions between Miller's various observations and his scientific beliefs. His objectivity and commitment to fact were felt to be without doubt, so there is no question of his having bent his observations to fit religious beliefs.' (Peter Tilbrook, 'Symposium on Geology and Natural History: Summary of Discussion' in *Celebrating the Life and Times of Hugh Miller*, (see Borley, above), pp. 134-137, (p.135)).

mimetic use of literary models while both his short fiction and his early folkloric history, *Scenes and Legends*, are characterised by generic oscillation, a feature possibly derived from Miller's folkloric inheritance but elsewhere, in the uncomfortable clashing of didactic purpose with fictional melodrama or folkloric storytelling, suggesting Miller's ambivalence towards his provocative, supernatural subject matter and his initial lack of confidence in retaining full control of his material.

By the time that Miller came to edit *The Witness* in the literary capital in 1840, however, Miller had achieved a voice of considerable rhetorical skill and force. His declamatory prose could strike to the core of his detractors: the Church patronage supporters, abusive landowners, neglectful employers, *laissez-faire* politicians. Yet in the confident, authoritative prose of *The Witness*, Miller was to retain his popular, inclusive style. The autobiographical address, typical of Miller's writing, lent considerable authority to his analysis of traditional culture and the labouring experience. W. M. Mackenzie has expressed the singular achievement of Hugh Miller in addressing the commonalty of Scotland, writing that 'probably no single man since has so powerfully moved the mind of Scotland, or dealt with it on more familiar or decisive terms.'⁸ A supporter of gradual, constitutional reform, Miller's primary agenda was the spiritual and intellectual elevation of the general populace. Outspoken in matters of law and regarding social conditions, Miller was, nevertheless, no working-class radical; his allegiance was ultimately to the Evangelical vision of Thomas Chalmers and his semi-feudal system of parish benevolence and moral self-improvement. Instead, Miller's radicalism lies in the persistent strain of synthesis that characterises his thinking. His literary persona mediated the polarisation of the

⁸ W. M. Mackenzie, *Hugh Miller: A Critical Study*, p. 238.

classes. It was intended to appeal both to educated literary consumers as well as working men. Culturally, Miller conceived of himself as both a patriotic Scot and a British man of letters. His writing, from the early poetry through to his 1854 autobiography, persistently attempted to mediate the claims of traditional belief and post-enlightened philosophical scepticism. At a time when the climate was such that Robert Chambers in 1844 would publish his *Vestiges of Creation* anonymously for fear of being identified with ‘heretical’ developmentalist theories, Miller, a prominent religious spokesman, argued for the profound symbiosis of divinity and science. And while Miller remained committed to the ideologies of Evangelicism, his social and philosophical analysis was, nevertheless, characterised by a liberalism informed by a Moderate intellectual inheritance.

Despite the significance of Miller’s intellectual contribution to the nineteenth century, one senses that Miller lived the last years of his life with a feeling of disappointment and regret. With only half of his total literary output published by the time of his death (the rest existing as serialisations in *The Witness*), Miller seems to have felt that his career as an editor was never able to fulfil his ambition to produce a lasting contribution to the great works of literature. Moreover, his working-class origins and his identification with the ‘Popular’ Party in the Church alienated a notably class-conscious *literati* that considered itself above religious squabbles. After 1847, with the moderating influence of Chalmers gone, Miller’s resistance to the claims of political partisanship and his resolute impartiality and independence in the writing of *The Witness* resulted in his increasing isolation from the leadership of the Free Church. Peter Bayne is unequivocal in his identification of the dispute with Candlish as the decisive factor in provoking Miller’s increasing despondency in the last years of his life.

Though Miller triumphed, the memory of the fray rankled deep in his heart to the last, and its result on the whole, even to the paper, was melancholy. [...] The independence of the journal had been vindicated, once and forever; the clergy never came near the *Witness Office*; but, after all, it was isolation rather than independence that was attained, and there was a gaunt and desolate feeling about it. What it must have been to Hugh Miller is not easy to realise. Mrs Miller thinks that about the sum of it is that it broke his heart. In times of danger and difficulty he had been the eye of the fleet [...] and now [...] uniformed captains of the fleet, waiving him a cold adieu, held on their way without acknowledging that he or his ship were in existence. He never flagged in his service. While he continued to breathe, his name was a tower of strength for the Free Church, and had he seen her in danger, he would have rushed to the rescue as in those days of young and proud enthusiasm when he addressed his Letter to Lord Brougham; but his mind dwelt with brooding anguish upon the isolation into which he had been thrown, and on the whole, in its incidents and results, we may pronounce this quarrel with Dr Candlish the unhappiest occurrence of his life.⁹

Given Miller's suicide in 1856, these are strong words. It is worth noting too that they were written with the considerable influence of Lydia Miller who would not only have wished for Bayne's narrative to confirm her husband's importance and fidelity to the Free Church but also to emphasis the painful personal effects of Miller's rupture with it.

From the nineteenth century onwards Hugh Miller's posthumous reputation has been cast in the light of Romantic tragedy: as one whose suicide signalled both creative intensity and existential schism. Yet Miller's lasting significance lies in the achievement of a confident and radically synthetic literary contribution. The disappearance of Hugh Miller does not arise from tragic self-implosion but from the incompatibility between Miller's synthetic project and a period marked by religious partisanship, class division, literary polarisation and philosophical anxiety. Hugh Miller is both a reflection of and an implicit challenge to the times in which he lived. His attempts to bridge the discourses of science and religion, art and labour, folklore and philosophy emerge both from a personal ambivalence with regard to shifting

⁹ Peter Bayne, II, 296-7, 300-1.

values as well as a brave attempt at resolving these. Unfortunately Miller was to fall between shifting ground. In his own times he was celebrated as the outspoken voice of the Scottish people. But his attempts to give voice to the marginal and the neglected have, ultimately, languished in critical silence. *The Witness*, was, in its day, one of the most important newspapers of its time and by the 1850s was outselling its main rival, the *Scotsman*.¹⁰ But Miller's wish to mitigate Evangelical insularity resulted, similarly in erasion. The real tragedy is that Miller was unable, ultimately, to synthesise his radical achievement with his perpetual neglect. The final irony is that Hugh Miller, the prototypical synthesist, has been appended as an emblem of nineteenth-century crisis and division, against which his work was a consistent act of mediation.

¹⁰ Michael Shortland, 'Hugh Miller's Contribution to The Witness 1840 – 1856' in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, (see Shortland, above), p. 288.

Appendix A:

Miller's 1828 Project of 'Things which I intend doing'

'PART FIRST: GEOMETRY, ARCHITECTURE, SCULPTURE, DRAWING; ETC.

1. To fill a book containing from thirty to forty pages with such problems of practical Geometry as are of use to the architect and builder
2. To execute in the best style a complete set of architectural drawings, beginning with Egyptian, and ending with Gothic architecture.
3. To study the proportions of the human figure as exemplified in the Grecian school of sculpture.
4. To practise cutting in stone foliage, shells, Heraldic figures, the Ionic, Corinthian, and composite capitals, &c.
5. To fill about a dozen pages with the varieties of the Roman, Italian, old English and Saxon alphabets; the letter of each to be formed in my best and neatest manner, and the whole to be shown to strangers as a specimen in my skill in inscription engraving.
6. To make a set of drawing of such of the old buildings of Ross-shire as I have taken sketches of in the course of my casual peregrinations through that country, such as the Tower of Fairburn, Castle Leod, Craighouse, Lochslin, Balconie, &c.
7. To make a set of drawings of the scenery of the parish of Cromarty, including two views of the town, one from the west, the other from the east; two views of Cromarty House, one from the old chapel, the other from the green in front. One from the hill above the Laich Craig of the Bay of Cromarty, another of the same from the Sutor Road. One view of the Laich Criag from the wood adjoining. One of the Sinkan Hillock from the Sach Craig. One of the Apple-Garden from the Red Nose. One of the Moray Firth from the Gallow Hill. One of the Gallow Hill from the Moray Firth. One of MacArthur's Bed. One from Hespny Home, and three to be taken from different points in the Burn of Craighouse.
8. To try how I will succeed in portrait painting and landscape in oil colours.
9. To practise the old hand until the best judges would be unable to distinguish between a piece of my writing in the ancient style and a manuscript two hundred years old.
10. To make a set of drawings of all the fine wild flowers and pretty coloured butterflies to be found in this part of the country.
11. To make a piece of mosaic work of five stones found on the shores of Cromarty, or in the caves of the Gallow Hill.

'PART SECOND: LITERATURE: PROSE COMPOSITION

1. I intend writing a work, humorous and descriptive, to be entitled "Four Years in the Life of a Journeyman Mason"
2. I intend writing a history of my varying thoughts of men and manners, right and wrong, philosophy and religion, from my twelfth to my twenty-sixth year.
3. I intend writing a description of the town and parish of Cromarty, its traditional history and character of its inhabitants
4. I intend writing a memoir of my father's life.
5. I intend writing the life of my uncle, Alexander Wright.
6. I intend making a collection of all the letters I have written my friends, and all I have received from them.
7. I intend writing an Essay on the Book of Psalms.
8. I intend writing a memoir of my friend, Will Ross
9. I intend writing a memoir of my townsman, David Henderson.
10. I intend writing an essay on the doctrine of pre-destination as connected with that of faith, for the perusal of my friend, Will Ross.
11. I intend writing letters to George Corbett on sermon writing and sermon writers, and also a sermon for him on a given text.

12. I intend completing my letter to Clericus and writing out a fair copy of it for my friend, J. Swanson. I intend writing a collection of miscellaneous essays in the manner of the *Spectator*, to be entitled *The Egotist*.
13. I intend writing two letters descriptive of the Herring Fishery and containing its traditional history.

‘PART THIRD. LITERATURE: POETRY

1. I intend collecting all my Juvenile Poems into one volume, correcting and altering them as I see proper.
2. I intend writing “The Widow of Dunskaith,” a legendary poem.
3. I intend writing “The Lady of Balconie,” a legendary poem.
4. I intend writing “The Chapel,” a descriptive poem.
5. I intend writing “The Leper,” a sacred poem.
6. I intend new-modelling and completing “An Hour at Eve,” a moral poem.
7. I intend writing an Ode to the Ness.
8. I intend writing an Address to the Northern Institution.

Appendix B:
Miller's Changing Representations

Plate 1



Plate 2

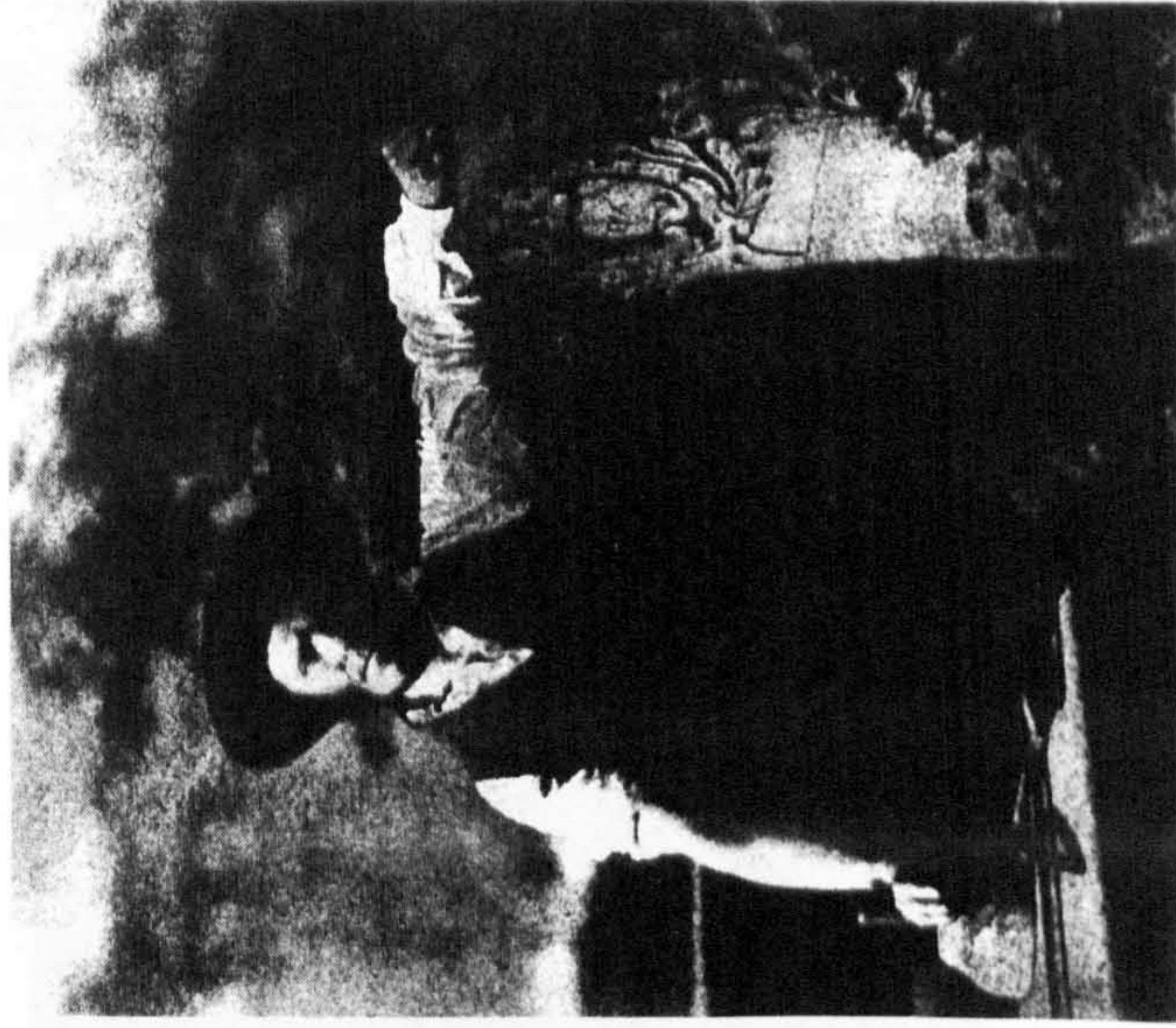
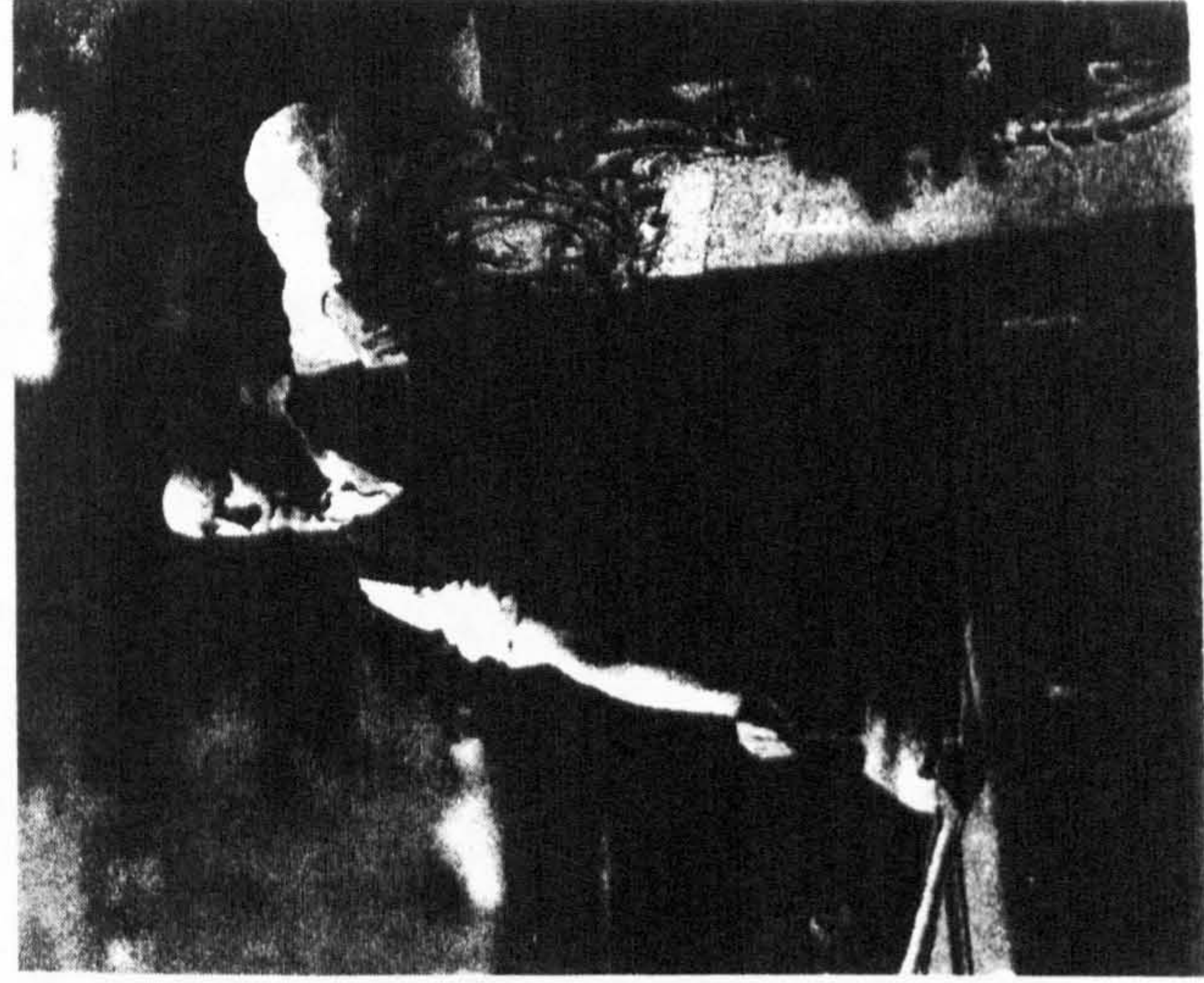


Plate 3



Plates 1 and 2: 'The Cromarty Stonemason' c. 1843

Plate 3: 'The Cromarty Stonemason' c. 1844

Calotypes by D. O Hill and Robert Adamson

Plate 4



Plate 4: Edinburgh Man of Letters
Photograph by J. G Tunny c. 1854

Plate 5



Plate 5: Edinburgh Man of Letters
[From Ballou's *Pictorial Drawing Room Companion* (1857)]

Plate 6

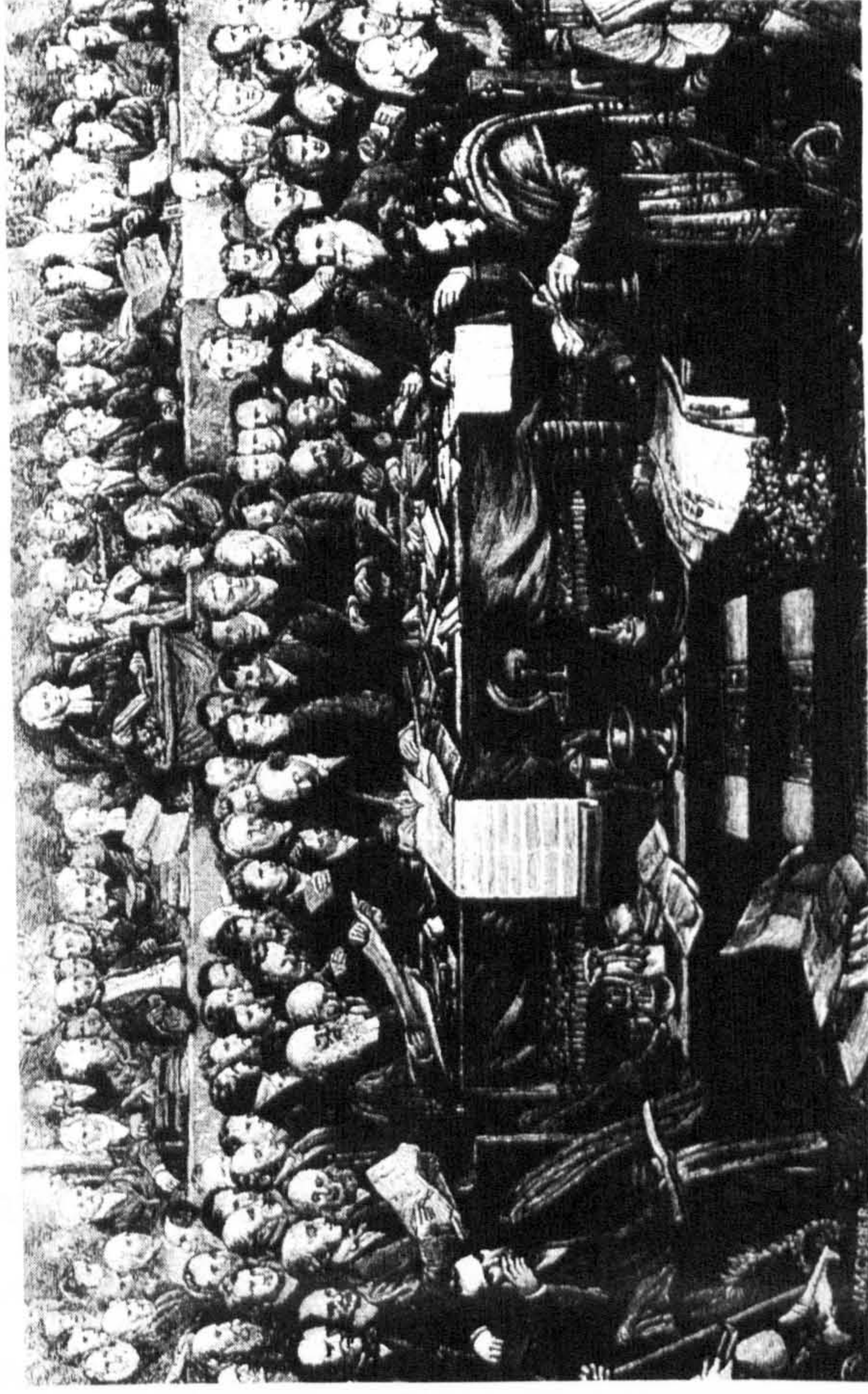


Plate 6: 'Signing of the Deed of Demission'
c. 1844 Segment of an oil painting by D. O. Hill
Miller is depicted, bottom right, wearing his
characteristic plaid.

Appendix C

The Anxiety of the Autodidact

Part I: A Working Man's Canon?

Hugh Miller was not alone in his literary anxiety regarding the established world of letters to which he sought entrance. Examining some of the contemporary and near-contemporary Scots named in Miller's tentative canon of working men writers, this appendix examines the extent to which literary anxiety is a common feature of the autodidactic experience.

In *My Schools and Schoolmasters* Miller is most comprehensive in his identification of a shared autodidactic tradition. Here, he identifies Robert Burns (1759 – 1796), James Hogg (1770 – 1835), Robert Tannahill (1774 – 1796), Alexander Wilson, (1776 – 1813), Allan Cunningham (1784 – 1832), William Thom (1798-1843), Robert Chambers (1802-1871) and the brothers Bethune, Alexander (1804-1843) and John (1811 – 1839).¹ Alongside these, Miller also named several English writers including Robert Bloomfield (1766 – 1823), Ebenezer Elliott (1781 – 1849), Henry Kirke-White (1785 – 1806), John Clare (1793 – 1864). Miller's conception like that of John Clare before him, (and perhaps influenced by him), was therefore of a cross-border community of self-taught writers. Space does not permit a full enquiry into the extent of literary confidence manifest in these English writers. However, a cursory examination of autobiography, biographical studies and letters does suggest a shared literary anxiety.²

¹ Hugh Miller, *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, p. 490.

² Bloomfield was perhaps the most assured in his literary position. However, he scrupulously revised and re-wrote his works, submitting them several times for literary approval. His 'Journey down the Wye' he submitted severally to three family friends, to the fellow poet Samuel Rodgers and to his original benefactor before he re-wrote the entire poem. Still dissatisfied, he submitted the revised version to a Mr Park of Hampstead who approved it and pencilled in a few suggestions. His final remarks on the poems are characteristic, 'With this encouragement, I once more wrote out the whole, gave the brat a name, and offered it to my bookseller'. (William Wickett and Nicholas Duval, *The Farmer's Boy: The Story of a Suffolk Poet, Robert Bloomfield, his Life and Poems 1766 – 1823* (Suffolk: Terence Dalton, 1971), p.49). Ebenzer Elliott, the so-called corn-law rhymer evinces a similar lack of assurance in his poetic attainments, even after he had achieved success. Rodger Dataller, in his commemorative essay on Elliott's achievements notes that, despite the largely political motivations of his work, Elliott still sought literary approval: 'Elliott received [...] notice gratefully; but at the same time his aesthetic sensibility had been deeply touched. Was he being considered merely as an artisan *litteratuer*, whose humble status alone provoked attention? "Must I then conclude that I owe the notice which has been taken of the Corn Law Rhymes to the supposition that they are the work of a mechanic?" The bitterness of a generation of neglect fell from his pen'. (Roger Dataller, 'Ebenezer Elliott: The Corn Law Rhymer', *Ebenezer Elliott: The Corn Law Rhymer: A Commemorative Brochure* (Sheffield: Sheffield City Libraries and the Rotherham Public Library [n.d]), p. 8-9). Defensive pride is also manifest in the biography of Elliott, who reveals in his autobiography that the composition of the vitriolic poem lampooning Lord Byron

Before fully examining the corpus of working men writers identified by Miller, it is useful to consider the seminal figure of Robert Burns, progenitor of the 'peasant poet' role, and who, in his own literary career, can be seen to incur the anxiety of the autodidact. Robert Burns, as we have seen, was complicit in the creation of his rustic persona, aware of its appeal to the literary fashions of the time. Valentina Bold in her study of autodidact writers in Scotland has described how these writers 'entered into complex negotiations with their supposed social superiors. Burns demonstrated considerable skill in befriending and being befriended by the *literati* and their acolytes.'³ Burns's complex relationship to the *literati* of the time saw him reaching for ever wider and more versatile modes of expression by which to negotiate the relationship between the values of social convention upheld by the establishment and his interrogation of them. Kenneth Simpson cites Burns as an 'acute example of the multiplicity of voice'⁴ which he considers to have featured in the so-called 'crisis of identity' in nineteenth-century Scotland. Burns's particular fluctuation of voice can be seen as peculiarly symptomatic of the insecurity of the Scottish autodidact in issuing a voice raised from a traditional manual-labouring background to the enlightened audience of the Edinburgh *literati*. David Daiches recognises the difficulty for Burns in resolving his dual role: 'He was now finding it more difficult than ever to come to terms with life, to reconcile his genius with his social position, and to determine his relation to the society of his time.'⁵ In a letter to William Nicol, Burns wrote: 'I never, my friend, thought Mankind very capable of anything generous; but the stateliness of

resulted from an encounter with the famous poet in Rotherham in which Byron failed to sufficiently acknowledge Elliott's greeting. Henry Kirke White's correspondence suggests a notable degree of literary anxiety. His letters to his brother, Neville, are full of self-doubt and the search for literary assurance. Writing to a Mr B. Maddock, the poet complains, 'I am at present under afflictions and contentions of spirit heavier than I have ever yet experienced. I think at times I am mad and destitute of religion. My pride is not yet subdued; the unfavourable review (in the *Monthly*) of my unhappy work, has cut deeper than you could have thought [...] It represents me actually as a beggar going about gathering money to put myself to college, when my book is worthless [...] this Review goes before me wherever I turn my steps; it haunts me incessantly, and I am persuaded it is an instrument in the hands of Satan to drive me to distraction. I must leave Nottingham.' (Henry Kirke White, *The Remains of Henry Kirke White with an Account of his Life by Robert Southey* 2 vols (London: Longman, 1816) I, 99) Finally, it is clear that John Clare also experienced the literary anxiety of the autodidact and was angered by their exclusion from the literary mainstream. In a letter to Allan Cunningham in 1824, Clare complained of the snobbery which the self-taught writer must overcome: 'the 'Ettrick Shepherd', 'the Nithsdale Mason' and the 'Northamptonshire Peasant', are looked upon as intruders and stray cattle in the fields of the Muses [...] Well, never mind, we will do our best...' (John Clare quoted in Valentina Bold, 'James Hogg and the Scottish self-taught tradition', *The Independent Spirit: John Clare and the self-taught tradition* ed. John Goodridge (Tyne and Wear: The John Clare Society and The Margaret Grainger Memorial Trust, 1994), pp. 69 - 86 (p.69)).

³ Valentina Bold, 'Nature's Making: James Hogg and the Autodidactic Tradition in Scottish Literature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 1997), p. 63.

⁴ Kenneth Simpson, *The Protean Scot*, p. 185.

the Patricians in Edin, [sic] and the servility of my plebeian brethren, who perhaps formerly eyed me askance, since I returned home, have nearly put me out of conceit altogether with my species.’⁶

Burns’s letters to his patrons exhibit a blend of pride and desire to please, characteristic of the peasant poet. In his study of Burns, Simpson defines a personality characterised by a fragile egotism, writing that ‘swagger and bluster – in both behaviour and language – are the early reflections of the self-consciousness that was to terminate in multiple personality.’⁷ If Simpson’s final diagnosis appears somewhat hyperbolic then his observation at least draws attention to Burns’s social and cultural sensitivity and his defensive awareness that his literary success depended upon external validation. Similarly, Valentina Bold observes that desperation combined with ‘prickliness’ was to be characteristic of the peasant poet.

‘Burns experienced genuine anxiety regarding his autodidactic status as a semi-professional poet [...] there is often extreme anxiety, countering the pride he expresses elsewhere in his social origins’.⁸

Nevertheless, Burns was ambivalent in his relationship to authority and to patrons. Bold describes a ‘blend of independence and melancholic passivity’ in his letters to Mrs Dunlop. Moreover, Burns’s characteristic use of multiple personae and reductive irony was a means of retaining a crucial two-sidedness in his poetic approach. His chameleon ability to satirise characters through the adoption of various personas (from ‘Holy Willie’ to ‘The Twa Dogs’) allowed him to adopt both the position of the attacker and the attacked. In the same way, the use of irony facilitated a self-reflexive mockery that blurs the distinction between the poet and his subject. This creative ambivalence would later be adopted by Hogg in narratives such as the *Justified Sinner* (1824), where the author can neither be identified with the rational narrating Editor or the disturbing monologue of the demonically possessed Robert Wringhim. The autodidact author, straddling both the culture of the traditional and that of the cosmopolitan, retains a protective ambiguity. His existential position is itself a composite: he is always both insider and outsider or, as Daiches puts it ‘between two

⁵ David Daiches, *Robert Burns* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1952), p. 256.

⁶ Robert Burns, letter to William Nicol quoted in David Daiches, *Robert Burns*, p. 256.

⁷ Kenneth Simpson, *The Protean Scot*, p. 187.

⁸ Valentina Bold, ‘Nature’s Making’, p. 68, 71.

worlds'⁹ This dualistic approach allows the autodidact both to articulate the different values of society whilst remaining at a parodical distance. To adhere to one position is to endanger the autodidact's valuable mutability, namely, the escape valve of ambivalence.

Biographical and critical analysis of the lives and writing of Miller's canon of working men writers is scant. However, a cursory examination of the evidence that is available manifests the recurring features of defensive pride, literary self-consciousness, despondency and ambivalence that can be seen to characterise a peculiarly autodidactic experience of anxiety, a social and cultural insecurity that compounds literary anxiety of influence experienced by the beginning writer.

The biographer of Robert Tannahill, the self-educated poet-weaver from Paisley, remarks that 'the anxious care of his reputation is a striking feature of the poet's character'¹⁰ while Valentina Bold also notes that he 'was sensitive to the fact that he was treated as a peasant poet of limited ability.'¹¹ Tannahill had his editor burn some of his amateur poems, writing to him in 1808, 'I am really ashamed of these bungled airs which I have sent you [...] it was indeed presumption in me to think of writing them for you. Let my fondness to send you something of the kind plead as my exculpation, and be so kind as to consign them to the flames.'¹² The literary disappointments that beset Tannahill's later career heightened his sense of insecurity and he increasingly suffered from fits of depression. His earlier biographer reflects: 'the melancholy to which Tannahill had been occasionally subject, now became deep and habitual. He evinced a proneness to imagine that his best friends were disposed to injure him, and a certain jealous fear of his claims to genius being impugned [...] He now set himself to destroy all his manuscripts; not a scrap which he could possibly collect was allowed to escape the flames.'¹³ Tannahill committed suicide by drowning in 1810, aged thirty-six.

Unfortunately, little has been written on the subject of Alexander Wilson's private world. However, Clark Hunter's upbeat account of Wilson's life does note Wilson's disappointment at his lack of critical recognition (coupled with persistent libel litigation) leading to a protracted illness in 1790, which Hunter attributes to depression.

⁹ David Daiches, *Robert Burns*, p. 256.

¹⁰ David Semple, *The Poems and Songs of Robert Tannahill with Life and Notes* (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1847), p. xxi.

¹¹ Valentina Bold, 'Nature's Making', p. 423.

¹² Robert Tannahill, letter to George Thomson, (editor of *Select Melodies*), quoted in Philip A. Ramsay, *The Works of Robert Tannahill with Life of the Author*, p. xxvii (August 1808).

¹³ David Ramsay, *Works of Robert Tannahill*, pp. xxxiv-xxxv.

After years of literary suppression as a result of his radical politics, Wilson wrote in a letter in 1801 of his 'wretched' state: 'I have lost all relish for this country, and, if Heaven spares me, I shall soon see the shores of all Caledonia.'¹⁴ He left for Philadelphia in 1802 where he abandoned literature and pursued a career in ornithology.

Allan Cunningham, perhaps the most successful, after Hogg, of all the Scottish autodidacts identified by Miller, was born in Nithsdale, the son of a farmer, and worked, like Miller, as a journeyman mason. In 1806 Cunningham met with Hogg and followed in the Ettrick Shepherd's successful adaption of the peasant poet role. Yet Cunningham, while conforming to the rustic persona of 'Honest Allan Cunningham' also resented it. He recognised that success was only possible in literary London if one, as he put it, 'stoops himself in the command of others'. Valentina Bold refers to Cunningham's 'autodidactic pride', observing that 'self effacement was not one of Cunningham's traits'.¹⁵ When William Jerdan, editor of the *Literary Gazette*, indicated an 'error' in Cunningham's work, the poet responded: 'it must go in as I wrote it, or not at all. What do I care for the gender of pronouns? We care naething for such things in Nithsdale, and I won't in London.'¹⁶ Like Tannahill before him, Cunningham demonstrated an acute sensitivity regarding his literary abilities. As his biographer David Hogg records it:

He was extremely touchy on the merits of his compositions, so that editors and he were frequently at variance. A writer of the *American Journal* of 7th September, 1871, says 'Mr Cunningham [...] could not bear to hear any of his productions criticised, even by his most intimate friends and considered professional criticism the most contemptible and worthless of occupations.'¹⁷

Fiercely private and protective of his independence Cunningham had his friend, Douglas McGhie burn all the letters received from him prior to McGhie's death. Cunningham died of a stroke aged fifty-seven.

William Thom, the poet-weaver from Inverurie, also combined those qualities of defensive egotism and insecurity that characterise the self-taught writer. As his biographer comments, Thom was both 'somewhat deficient in the grace of humility'

¹⁴ Clark Hunter, *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1983), p. 231.

¹⁵ Valentina Bold, 'Nature's Making', p. 413.

¹⁶ Allan Cunningham quoted in Valentina Bold, 'Nature's Making', p. 413-14

¹⁷ David Hogg, *The Life of Allan Cunningham*, p. 11.

whilst 'it was impossible for Thom to be indifferent to censure.'¹⁸ Like Miller, he displayed a seemingly confident assertion of his abilities, but was threatened and enraged by the smallest criticism.

In his 'Recollections' he describes (in the third person) the suspense of waiting to discover if his poems had been printed in the newspaper, (which he could not afford to pay for). 'His pain – for pain it was – had no connection with aught on earth, save and except the printing-office on which he gazed. Did his verses exist in *print*?'¹⁹ His words express little of the critical detachment of the assured writer. In 1841 he wrote to the editor of the *Aberdeen Journal*, "Oh! Sir it is difficult for those in other circumstances to think what a strife is his who has to battle lip-deep in poverty, with a motherless family and a *poetical temperament*! The last item the worst – inasmuch as it enhances ten-fold the pain that is *frequent*, and the joy that is *rare*.'"²⁰ He places an unusual degree of stress not only on the conditions in which he found himself, but on his excessive emotions regarding them. Despite a brief period of recognition by the Edinburgh critics, Thom died, aged forty-five, after a protracted illness resulting from chronic alcoholism.

Robert Chambers²¹ was, to a large degree, exempt from the severe privations of many of the self-taught writers of the time. Nevertheless, he was highly conscious of his low social standing and meagre means after his father's insolvency and removal to Edinburgh. In his autobiographical letters Chambers speaks of the uncertainty of his future and his anxiety at ever raising himself in the world. The letters, prior to his meeting with Scott, describe his resentment at being regarded as merely 'a broken down scholar' and he relates his near-suicidal feelings of despair at the prospect of a future which could 'appear so gloomy that I would shrink from it in fear.'²² His meeting with Scott was to prove crucial, however, to his later career and under the patronage of the 'Author of Waverley' Chambers achieved considerable literary status,

¹⁸ W. Skinner; 'Life' in *Rhymes and Recollections*, p. li, lvi.

¹⁹ William Thom, *Rhymes and Recollections*, p. 12

²⁰ Thom, *Rhymes and Recollections*, p. 34.

²¹ Robert Chambers, in partnership with his brother, William, created Edinburgh's most successful publishing house, W. and R. Chambers in 1832. Under the patronage of Sir Walter Scott, Robert Chambers grew into a respected poet, essayist and man of letters. Chambers, in turn, patronised several humble-born Scottish writers bringing many of their works into print for the first time. In 1844, he ventured into the arena of scientific debate with the publication of his *Vestiges of Creation*, the book that provoked Miller's outraged reply in *Footprints of the Creator* in 1849. Miller and Chambers had become friends some time in the late 1830s when Miller submitted his literary pieces to the *Chambers's Journal* and Miller recorded his admiration for the publisher in *My Schools and Schoolmasters*. Miller, however, never discovered that Robert Chambers was the anonymous author of the developmentalist *Vestiges*, the theories of which Miller argued forcefully against throughout his life.

later becoming one of the first literary patrons of working writers to have himself risen from the lower classes.

The Bethune brothers, John and Alexander, manual labourers from rural Fifeshire, never achieved the relative success of the other writers identified by Miller. In terms of literary output, their body of work is meagre, both being forced to earn a living from various jobs and suffering from exacerbated illness. In particular, the biography of John Bethune, whose work only became known after his death when his brother published a collection of his poems in 1840, is marked far less by a desire for literary recognition and more by the immediate need for financial return and survival. John Bethune, like Miller, appears to have suffered from a profound diffidence in public circles and, like Miller, sought independence sometimes to the cost of social advancement. During a life of considerable privation he turned down several offers of patronage, including a settlement in a parochial bank and a government position. Moreover, while less moved by critical indifference, according to his brother 'condescending notices [of his ability] never failed to disgust him'.²³ Despite Alexander Bethune's almost hagiographic biography of his brother, attesting to a placid and humble disposition, John Bethune's poem, 'Rejoice' does suggest some of the wounded pride of the neglected writer: 'Rejoice! and why? – To know my span | Is wearing fast away | In labours for the good of man | Which men with sneers repay | To know that I am poor, yet feel | My heart with pride beat high | With a stern pride which scorns to kneel | To base indignity.' ('Rejoice' ll. 1-8). John Bethune died, having suffered from recurrences of dyspepsia and consumption throughout his life, aged twenty-eight.

Alexander Bethune went on to see his brother's *Poems* published in 1840 and to experience brief literary acclaim with the publication of the jointly authored *Tales of the Scottish Peasantry* (1841) and his own *The Scottish Peasant's Fire-Side* (1843). Alexander, perhaps as a result of this recognition, appears to have possessed greater literary ambition than his brother and his literary anxieties were therefore, more acute. He was fiercely independent in his attitude towards literary patrons. Reflecting on the bondage incurred by financial patronage he wrote to his editor in January 1843, 'This is no world for poets, particularly poor ones, to live in.'²⁴ Yet he refused even the most disinterested acts of charity. In his biography of Alexander Bethune, McCrombie

²² Robert Chambers quoted in C. H. Layman, *Man of Letters*, pp. 86, 88.

²³ Alexander Bethune quoted in John Ingram, 'Biographical Sketch of the Brothers Bethune' in Alexander and John Bethune, *Tales of the Scottish Peasantry* (Glasgow: Thomas D. Morison, 1884), pp. 9-30 (p.10).

describes a man of a cautious and self-conscious nature. Like Tannahill before him, he requested that his close friend, John Adamson, burn his first work of poetry lest anyone should see it, and entrusted his private papers to McCrombie alone, forbidding that anyone else have access to them, for fear of criticism. And like Ebenezer Elliott, so defensive was Bethune about his literary abilities that instead of trusting in his literary success 'he was sometimes afraid that his friends were *making a demand* for his books, as a pretext for bestowing their own benevolence upon an author, who had too much of the 'pride of poverty' in his disposition to accept it in any other form.'²⁵

Scant as the information available often is, the biography of each of these writers repeatedly describes a notable literary anxiety combined with defensiveness regarding social positions. It is in this context that Miller's own complex personality, his egotism and diffidence and his reliance on established literary models should be considered.

Part II: Mediating the Dialectic of Authority and Challenge: Miller, Hogg and Carlyle

That peripheral self-taught writers might feel a degree of literary anxiety is perhaps unsurprising. None of them (excepting Alexander Wilson and Robert Chambers, in other fields of endeavour) were ever able to rely on a comfortable income from their writings alone and must have struggled to assure themselves of their place in the literary canon whilst being aware that they stood outside the pale of the *literati*. But what is striking is the persistence of literary insecurity even in those autodidact writers who achieved a measure of recognition and success in their own lifetime. It is to this latter group that Hugh Miller belongs. It is instructive, therefore, to compare his position with that of two other well-known self-taught and humble-born Scottish writers of the nineteenth century, James Hogg and Thomas Carlyle, who can be seen to negotiate, as he did, the values of authority and of challenge to it. Moreover, the insecurity of the autodidact is further illustrated in these writers' search for an appropriate literary medium through which to express their particular voice.

James Hogg (1770-1835) was the first to inherit the mantle of the 'peasant poet', made fashionable after Burns, a role with which he consciously played, claiming, for example, to share the same birth-date as Burns (though no records can be found to substantiate this claim). The identification is hardly surprising. Like Burns's 'two

²⁴ Alexander Bethune quoted in John Ingram, *Ibid*, p. 22.

²⁵ John Ingram, *Ibid*, p. 25.

worlds,' Hogg oscillated between the contrasting worlds of Ettrick and Edinburgh, traditional and cosmopolitan and he adopted the same techniques of mutable persona and ambivalence in negotiating the conflicting values of his dual experience. Hogg's position as the 'Ettrick Shepherd' in Edinburgh is not far removed from Burns's role as both insider and outsider to the circles of the *literati* in the previous century. In 1802 Hogg became friends with the influential Walter Scott when Scott was gathering material for his *Minstrelsy*, and although Hogg was to provide a valuable source of traditional material for Scott, the meeting was more crucial still for Hogg. Scott was to act as something of a literary patron towards Hogg, advising him on matters on grammar, style and propriety and, as Hogg's letters suggest, forwarding him several loans throughout Hogg's troubled financial career. Hogg's attitude to Scott in his own writings is therefore understandably ambiguous, reflecting Hogg's experience of him as a kindly friend and patron, who, however, was a long way from acknowledging him as a literary peer and companion. He was conscious that Scott also regarded their relationship in the light on his own ideas about feudal responsibility, writing in his 'Familiar Anecdotes' that 'the only foible that I ever could discover in the character of Sir Walter was a too strong leaning to the old aristocrisy of the country. His devotion to titled rank was prodigious and in such an illustrious character altogether out of place'.²⁶ Scott's consciousness of a social hierarchy, would, as Robin MacLachlan writes, 'have been harmless but for its effect on Hogg's confidence. The anecdotes [related by Hogg] culminate in nearly every case in some social humiliation. What is more, the feudal role emphasised a relationship of superior and inferior, of giver and taker, which worked against an equal friendship.'²⁷

Nevertheless, Scott's attitude to Hogg, a humouring that could sometimes embody humour at Hogg's expense (Scott was endlessly fond of punning on Hogg's 'bestial' name), never descended to the snobbish nastiness that Hogg experienced at the hands of Lockhart and Wilson at *Blackwood's Magazine*. Wilson was largely responsible for the disrespectful caricaturing of Hogg as the boorish 'Shepherd' of the 'Noctes Ambrosianae' and Lockhart, who fell out with Hogg after Scott's death, presents him as Scott's jester in his *Life of Sir Walter Scott* (1837–8). There is a marked ambivalence in Hogg's relationship to these literary compeers. His last letter to

²⁶ James Hogg, *Memoir of the Author's Life and Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1972) p. 95.

his Blackwood's colleagues in 1835 contains both anger and supplication, writing: 'Dear Callants, Though I am now excluded from the pages of the *Maga* perhaps I may get a corner by and by.'²⁸

Despite Hogg's annoyance at Scott's often superior manner he nevertheless expressed an affection for the literary man who noticed and befriended him, writing in the 'Familiar Anecdotes': 'Sir Walter sought me out in the wilderness and attached himself to me before I had ever seen him and although I took cross fits with him his interest in me never subsided for one day or one moment.'²⁹ From a literary point of view, however, Hogg appeared to both seek Scott's help and, at the same time, to resent it. Hogg's letter to Scott prior to the publication of *The Mountain Bard* (1707) is characteristic:

I received your brimful of criticisms, articles which I mortally abhor [...] You are by this time sensible that it will never be from correctness and equality that I am to depend on for my poetic character but only from scattered expressive hints [...] it is only from a conviction that if one man in Britain have a proper discernment in that species of poetry it is you that I am induced to listen at all'.³⁰

Ultimately, Hogg might have done well to listen a little less to Scott's punctilious advice. The result of repeated criticism about the 'indelicate' of his work from Scott and others was, as MacLachlan writes, 'yet again, to make Hogg self-conscious in a manner particularly harmful to a largely instinctive writer.'³¹

Hogg's works were repeatedly condemned for their 'crudity' and 'barbarity' largely because they spoke with a native frankness that was 'indelicate' to polite sensibilities. Aware of the increasing scepticism and fashionable disregard for supernatural subjects in the nineteenth century. Hogg nevertheless retained a sincere desire to articulate his particular experience and understanding of Scotland in his work. His was expressly a Scotland of older, traditional values, of ribald Border lore and the freakish supernatural. Hogg therefore responded to contemporary attitudes by adopting

²⁷ Robin W. MacLachlan, 'Scott and Hogg: Friendship and Literary Influence' *Scott and His Influence* eds. J. H. Alexander and David Hewitt (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1983) pp. 331 – 340, p.335.

²⁸ Alan L. Strout, *The Life and Letters of James Hogg* 2 vols (Lubbock: Texas Technical press, 1946) II, 105.

²⁹ James Hogg, *Memoir of the Author's Life and Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, p. 124-5.

³⁰ James Hogg, letter to Walter Scott quoted in Valentina Bold, 'James Hogg and the Scottish self-taught tradition' in *The Independent Spirit* (see Goodridge, above), p. 73.

³¹ Robin W. MacLachlan, 'Scott and Hogg: Friendship and Literary Influence', in *Scott and His Influence* (see Alexander and Hewitt, above), p. 336.

ambivalence and dual personae in his writing. In 'The Spy' he mediates between the roles of the fallen gentleman and the rustic storyteller, allowing him to balance the values of the one against the other. His work repeatedly adopts this technique. In *Basil Lee* (1820), we observe the antithetical narratives of the frank story of Wat and the more occult tales of Katherine, and in a similar way *The Three Perils of Woman* (1823) is at once a domestic novel of manners, a Jacobin romance and a complex folk tale. *The Three Perils of Man* (1822) is structured around the antitheses of chivalric versus folk values, of romance versus realism, between the psychological and the supernatural, fiction and reality right down to the antitheses of individual characters and mirrored scenes. And this antithetical approach culminates in Hogg's most ambivalent of novels, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of A Justified Sinner* (1824). The novel derives its thematic complexities from the binary opposition of different characters, values and interpretations so that the question as to the culpability of Robert Wringhim must finally rest on whether we concede his narrative to be an instance of psychological breakdown or whether the novel can be read as an account of demonic forces at work in a godless soul.

Not only does Hogg structure his novels around dualistic readings, several of his works employ dual or multiple narratives in the shape of editors and anonymous storytellers which function to detach Hogg from authorial accountability. Like Miller, Hogg recurrently denies creative responsibility for his tales, attributing their sources elsewhere. In Miller, as I have suggested, this is a feature of his insecurity regarding his creative enterprise, in Hogg it is more complex. Delegating his tales to another source, Hogg hoped to evade a one-sided reading of his works that might be identifiable to his own authorial values. In *The Three Perils of Man*, for example, Hogg repeatedly cites the old curate, Isaac as the source of his tale. The intrusion of passages that draw attention to Isaac's telling and the written re-telling of the tale serve to emphasise the narrative's very fictionality. The stories, then, are neither objective truth nor are they reliably subjective (having been passed through several sources). When Charlie Scott and his cohorts narrate their own tales, each have a 'factual' basis in the tellers' subjective experience. But the stories themselves are conspicuously marked by the fantastical and unbelievable (as well as by their being judged on their purely fictional values). In the same way *Confessions of A Justified Sinner* juxtaposes the rational alibis of 'authoritative' interpretations in the form of court documents, newspapers and

(ambiguous) eye-witness accounts with unreliable local tradition and a highly subjective testimony given by the 'sinner' himself.

Just as Simpson identified a multiplicity of voice in Burns, Hogg, by fracturing his narrative into multiple points of view, disintegrates absolute truth and evades final moral conclusion. Not only is Hogg reducing the feasibility of exclusive or 'absolute' readings, in this way he is also enabled to retreat from critical identification with his fictional subjects. This, of course, was a crucial point for Hogg. His fascination with the darker side of the otherworldly and with morbid psychological states was what so offended the sensibilities of his literary detractors. For this reason, we find in Hogg, just as in Burns before him, a fundamental feature of thematic ambivalence and narrative ambiguity. If Burns utilised the two-sided potentiality of irony, Hogg was to manipulate the thematic possibilities of dual readings. Just as the *Justified Sinner* maintains a fundamental ambiguity in its presentation of moral disintegration, so too the very subject of the *The Three Perils of Man* is deception as seen in the intrigues of war, in the wiles of women and in the wicked ways of man and his magic. In the final analysis, Hogg appears to suggest that truth and reality are unknowable. Yet, it certainly appears that this very narrative and thematic fluidity was, in part, Hogg's creative response to a very real antithesis of values in his own experience between traditional Ettrick and its bawdy, outspoken and mystical lore, and polite, literary Edinburgh with its etiquette and sensibilities and censures. As we have seen with Burns, the pressure contingent upon responding to this kind of confrontation produced a kind of division, albeit one made fruitful. Douglas Gifford speculates that it was the dubiety of Hogg's marginal position that forced him to respond in this way. 'A polarity had been established; insecurity about his social position had created a mild form of split personality.'³²

If Miller and Hogg, the one from Cromarty, the other from Ettrick, share many of the same features of defensive pride, insecurity and ambivalent approach, then there is one striking difference in their relationship to enlightened Edinburgh. Hogg was defiant in avowing his relationship to the traditional, preternatural world of old Ettrick. ('Dear Sir Walter! Ye can never suppose that I belong to your School o' Chivalry! Ye are the king o' that school, but I'm the king o' the Mountain and Fairy School, which is

³² Douglas Gifford, *James Hogg*, p. 70.

a far higher one than yours.’³³ ‘A great number of people nowadays are beginning broadly to insinuate that there are no such things as ghosts, or spiritual beings visible to mortal man [...] The bodies are daft. Heaven mend their wits! [...] I wish they had been where I have often been’.³⁴) Poems such as ‘Kilmeny’ and ‘The Witch of Fife’ could charm the romantic imagination of the polite readership of the nineteenth century whilst in his novels Hogg’s love of witchcraft, diablerie and demonic states could be offset by his rendering of morbid psychologies. Miller, however, was not so confident. His interest in the supernatural is almost surreptitious, his response to it always ambiguous. Lacking variety of creative strategy, Miller had not the means to utilise the kinds of complex technique employed by Hogg when dealing with traditional and supernatural subject matter. Indeed, with Miller’s most frequent subject being his own life and experience, and as a rural, self-taught writer wishing to forge a position of some literary authority in post-Enlightenment Edinburgh, he could hardly ally himself to such beliefs. Where Hogg retained a crucial outlet for the articulation of his particular experience and understanding of the world through his creative writing, Miller’s equivocal treatment of traditional beliefs expresses a personal ambivalence regarding the claims of sceptical philosophy and folklore that often results in painful ambiguity and circumspection.

Despite Hogg’s clever and creative response to the prejudices of the nineteenth-century *literati*, his writing failed to gain real critical acceptance in his own lifetime. His poetry and song were appreciated as long as they remained within the pastoral, whimsical and rustic sphere. But Hogg’s movement into creative prose was greeted with censure. His short fiction was considered ‘too coarse’ for polite tastes. When Hogg ventured into historical romance with the publication of *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* in 1818, the move was seen to challenge the authority of Scott’s historical novel *Old Mortality* (1816). When Hogg produced *The Three Perils of Man* in 1822 it was decried as a work of indulgent folk grotesquerie as its subtitle *War, Women and Witchcraft* suggests. His later *The Three Perils of Women* (1823) was critically lambasted. Writing in *Blackwood’s* in 1823 John Wilson attacked the novel with typical relish:

³³ James Hogg, quoted in by James Veitch in the ‘Introduction’, *Memorials of James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd* ed. by his daughter, Mrs Garden, (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1885) p. x.

³⁴ James Hogg, *Tales and Sketches by the Ettrick Shepherd*, 6 vols (Glasgow: Blackie, 1836) I, 314.

Now, James Hogg, Shepherd of Ettrick [...] this style of writing will not by any means enable your pot to boil [...] The public taste is not very refined, not over-delicate; but there are things innumerable in these three volumes, which the public will not bolt. [...] We have heard such vulgarity objected to even in Glasgow; and it is not thought readable aloud in Largs [...] if you go on at this rate, you will be called before the Kirk Session. This may be thought vigour by many of your friends in the Auld Town [...] but it will not do at a Public Entertainment.³⁵

Hogg was by this point exhausted in the search for an acceptable literary medium capable of combining his desire for creative challenge with his wish for critical approbation. A letter to Scott in 1821 betrays Hogg's insecurity and despondency towards his own creative judgement:

I am grown to have no confidence whatsoever in my own taste or discernment in what is to be well or ill taken by the world or by individuals. Indeed it appears that were I to make my calculations by inverse proportion I would oftener be right than I am.³⁶

In 1824, nevertheless, Hogg produced what is now one of the most acclaimed novels of the Scottish canon. But *The Justified Sinner* met only with more hostile press. Concluding upon Hogg's neglect Gifford writes:

Hogg could develop no further. For the rest of his life he retreated into sketches, short ghost stories, and occasional poems [...] The final sign of demoralisation came when he was encouraged in 1832 to collect his work. It is an indication of the shallowness of contemporary criticism and of his own lack of self-confidence that he decided to savage *The Three Perils of Man*. He cut it to one third of its original length. He stripped away all the magnificent folklore and colourful supernatural extravaganza, leaving merely the Border skirmishes which he called, for the purposes of the collection *The Siege of Roxburgh*.³⁷

If Hogg had once been inspired by the achievements of the humble-born Robert Burns, then it was through his appeal to the literary values of Walter Scott and others that Hogg attained his entrance to the elite nineteenth-century *literati*. Once there, however, Hogg would be forced to rely upon many of those same creative strategies that Burns had utilised in responding to the constraints of an imperious literary climate.

³⁵ John Wilson, *Blackwood's Magazine*, vol. XIV, 1833, pp. 427 – 437. Notably this is the amended version of the original review, which Blackwood thought too strong.

³⁶ James Hogg, letter to Walter Scott, quoted in Douglas Gifford, *James Hogg*, p. 136 (November 1821).

³⁷ Douglas Gifford, 'Introduction', *The Three Perils of Man: War, Women and Witchcraft* (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1996), pp. vii–xl, (pp. xix–xx).

A mixture of Hogg's own insecurity in negotiating between the conflicting worlds of Edinburgh and Ettrick and the deviousness and arrogance of his so-called literary friends meant that Hogg never achieved an equal footing and a place of respect in the literary canon. Disturbing the rigid delineation between the educated elite and rude labouring classes, Burns, Hogg, Miller and the other self-taught, rural and traditional writers of the time could only find a place on the periphery of the literary establishment. As Bold writes, 'ultimately, the autodidact was perceived as a sociological phenomenon and marginalised.'³⁸

At first notice, Thomas Carlyle might be regarded as belonging to that inner circle of writers in established Edinburgh letters. However, closer scrutiny of Carlyle's beginnings and his protracted search to attain critical recognition tell a quite different story. Despite his attendance at the University of Edinburgh, Carlyle can, arguably, be regarded as self-educated in that his most profound education never took place within Edinburgh academia, where he afterwards claimed that he learnt very little, but through his own sedulous efforts in a search for personal meaning.³⁹ Like Burns, Hogg and Miller, Carlyle was the son of a working man, raised amidst the religious and traditional influences of a rural Scottish community. His access to University, rather than a matter of course, is representative of the experience of the rural Scottish 'lad o' pairs' (a truth made cliché by the kailyard tradition) who scratched his earnings from scholarships and family support in order to raise himself into a respectable career in medicine or the ministry. Indeed, Carlyle's course into established education is only a step away from Miller's own path in that Miller chose to reject his uncle's financial support for a University education and to enter instead into labouring life. Carlyle's experience of academia, as a poor man's son, was therefore that of the intelligent outsider. It is far from representative of the camaraderie of middle-class students such as Scott, Lockhart, Wilson and Cockburn and their privileged school and University education.

Despite Carlyle's eventual success, there are several features of the anxiety of the autodidact which mark his writing. Carlyle's literary career, like Hogg's and Miller's reveals an exhaustive search for literary voice. Like them, he began in poetry

³⁸ Valentina Bold, 'Nature's Making', 91.

³⁹ The critics Ian Campbell and A.L. Le Quesne both describe Carlyle as 'self-educated' (Ian Campbell, *Thomas Carlyle* (Edinburgh: The Saltire Society, 1993), pp. 19-20 and A. L. Le Quesne *Carlyle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 8).

and fiction, which he abandoned early. Next, he turned to translation and periodical articles and his literary legacy combines biography, history, autobiography and social critique. In these works we find those recurrent features of multiple narrative and thematic ambiguity that distinguishes the writing of the Scottish autodidact. *Sartor Resartus* (1830 – 31) reflects a characteristic ambiguity in its generic blending of spiritual autobiography and social critique. Carlyle here adopts what was to become a typical feature of narrative ambiguity in the interplay between a fictionalised editor, Professor Teufelsdröckh, and the unnamed subject of the book. If *Sartor* is to be read as a cryptic account of Carlyle's own spiritual crisis and affirmation, then he defends against the singular identification with his protagonist by filtering his narrative through the sceptical eyes of the German professor. In a manner reminiscent of Hogg's adoption of the editorial voice in the *Justified Sinner*, Carlyle remains detached from this highly personal history and defends his message against the charge of excessive ethereality by his equivalent adoption of the persona of Teufelsdröckh who voices the sceptical values of nineteenth-century rationalism.

In *The French Revolution* (1837) Carlyle's immediately succeeding work, he continues his dialectic of opposites. Once more, nature and supernature, dream and history, madness and reason confront one another and merge with their opposites, in a manner which recalls the yoking of opposites in Burns's poetry. And, as in Hogg, Carlyle's equivocal stance points to a greater thematic ambivalence between notions of Goodness and Evil in the human condition. His resolution of binary opposites into a ultimately synthetic vision is to be one of his most striking resemblances to Miller. *The French Revolution* is a landmark in nineteenth-century narrative forms. Its shifting multiple focus anticipates the techniques of modernism. In his gallery of portraits and collapsed time shifts, Carlyle rejected authorial fixity, claiming that 'the Eye of History is everywhere.' Moreover, history itself is a double journey extending both backwards in time and downwards into the self. Carlyle's radical reinterpretation of history is articulated in a striking chapter entitled 'Anti-Dryasdust' in his *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* (1845). Carlyle dramatises the two opposing sides of himself as an historian. 'Dryasdust,' the sterile chronicler, rummaging amidst the ghosts of the dead, is challenged by an unnamed writer and friend who courageously descends into the underworld and returns with the treasures of the past. Here, Carlyle rejects his role as the historian mole-digger amongst the relics of the dead and aspires instead to become a prophet in reverse unfolding the great epic of the Past.

Carlyle's strange dualistic vision re-emerges in *Past and Present* (1843). Just as in *Sartor*, the narrative perspective is divided into multiple narratives. The narrator here is the twelfth-century monk, Jocelin of Brakelond, his subject the spiritual 'hero' figure Abbot Sampson, who represented to Carlyle the supreme values of spirituality and practical leadership. Taken together, Jocelin and Abbot Sampson can be taken as Carlyle's projection of his own dual role, both as storyteller and prophet. In this elusive and powerful work, Carlyle articulates his deeply dual vision of humanity, history and time.

In wondrous Dualism, then as now, lived nations of breathing men, alternative, in all ways between Light and Dark: between Hope reaching high as Heaven and fear deep as Hell.⁴⁰

Even with Carlyle's later success, one wonders if his peculiar and recurrent strain of dualism and ambivalence does not derive from a certain discomfort with the shift in values that was taking place within his own lifetime. Several critics have recognised Carlyle's dependence upon the authoritarian God of Calvinism in his gospel of Hero Worship. The rapidity of Scotland's transition from rural to industrial society alarmed writers such as Carlyle and Miller (and comparatively, John Ruskin and William Cobbett in England) who respected the native values of the community and traditional beliefs of an older age. While Carlyle found himself severed from the Presbyterian faith of his upbringing, modern scepticism appalled him, and whilst he was not in any way anachronistic he rejected the individualistic values of the Industrial, utilitarian age. Carlyle seems to have found himself permanently stranded somewhere between the extremes of Annandale community and faith and the modern intellectual world, which demanded new answers and solutions.

The character of Thomas Carlyle, once more, betrays the characteristic anxiety of the humble-born man in the world of letters. In his biography of Carlyle, Campbell writes of his 'nervous insecurity [...] and although he had considerable talent of expression [...] he was very unsure of himself, except in the privacy of letters to his family.'⁴¹ In the early stages of his writing career, he admitted to Emerson and Mill, 'I never know or can even guess what or who my audience is, or whether I have an

⁴⁰ Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960) p. 132.

⁴¹ Ian Campbell, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 33

audience.’⁴² And Le Quesne records that, ‘humility and self-doubt were qualities that had their place in Carlyle’s complex personality; but he was a proud man.’⁴³ He was not lacking in confidence as to his literary abilities, but sometimes despaired of ever obtaining a literary voice. In a letter to Margaret Gordon in the 1820s Carlyle complained at having no stated position in society, no success following on hard work. Like Miller he was extremely protective of his independence⁴⁴ and he hated to be obliged to anyone for financial assistance or help of any kind. Despite a private sense of their own worth and an occasional arrogance regarding this, both men were apt to be extremely awkward in public society. Indeed, it is notable that both men have been described as ‘paradoxical’ in view of these seeming contradictions in their own personality and the persistent antagonisms of their work. Both suffered from an increasingly nervous and volatile disposition towards the ends of their lives. But the dividedness which critics have been so ready to impute upon these impressive writers, I might suggest, was more a characteristic of the shifting cultural and social values and paradoxes of the times in which they lived and in which they fought diligently to find workable solutions.

If both Carlyle and Miller sought to achieve literary authority, it was with the intention of preaching on behalf of the abused and underprivileged. Both writers regretted the spiritual degradation of modern society and called for a spiritual reformation to precede the material one. And if both could declaim combatively against their antagonists in debate, there is a genuine gentleness of spirit in their empathy toward their fellow men. In 1866, long after the embarrassments of Carlyle’s later dogmatic writing, he gave a lecture in the George Street Music Hall, ‘On the Choice of Books’. Campbell records of this speech:

To the students he recommended a rigorous course of reading and self-cultivation as he himself had achieved. He commended them to keep up their standards in studies and in their lives, and to fight the decay of standards and of ethics which he himself had always fought. In retracing for them the steps by which he had emerged from the nightmares which had haunted his youth and student days, he ended with a message of hope, quoted from his early idol, Goethe – *Wir heissen euch Hoffen!* We bid you hope.⁴⁵

⁴² Thomas Carlyle, quoted in Vanden Bosche, *Carlyle and the Search for Authority*, p. 48.

⁴³ A. L. Le Quesne, *Carlyle*, p. 87.

⁴⁴ Ian Campbell, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 149.

⁴⁵ Ian Campbell, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 134.

Some sixteen years earlier, Miller had written an article entitled 'An Unspoken Speech' in *The Witness* in which he imagined the advice that he might have given to a Young Men's Society. The article preaches, from his own example and experience, the values of self-reliance, hard work and moral sobriety closing with his own message of hope, '*Nil Desperandum*' – Never despair. In the same way that both men identified with the figure of Burns, their writings again and again return to the theme of the noble working man, he who retains his spiritual integrity and dignity in the face of an increasingly solipsistic world. In their politics neither Miller nor Carlyle were extreme. Both rejected Chartism and universal suffrage and argued instead for an intellectual and moral meritocracy; a society founded upon qualification rather than birthright, as demonstrated through education and labour. Their social critique was a radical declamation against the ills of contemporary society. As Miller would later preach, a principal value of self-cultivation lay in its autonomy from imposed conventional values. If both Carlyle's and Miller's writing is characterised by an appeal to establishment endorsement, then it is tempered by the outsider's particular gift for damning critique of that establishment's very structure and values.

However, there are some significant contrasts in the work of Carlyle and Miller. The voice with which Thomas Carlyle addressed his audience is a pedagogic, and occasionally even alienating one. Miller's address is much more inclusive and characterised by a genuine empathy and identification with his audience. If Carlyle occasionally is guilty of speaking down to his readership, then Miller, in asserting the dignity of the common man, was concerned always to speak up to him. This feature signals a more fundamental difference in the authors' attitudes to authority. Carlyle's confident approach to the literary authority of Scott⁴⁶ contrasts with Hogg, and Miller's ultimate subservience. Miller appealed to the authorities of classical eighteenth-century idioms. Carlyle on the other hand attempted to gain his authority by revolutionising the existing idiom. And he succeeded. As W.M. Mackenzie has noted in his analysis of Miller, 'he sought his models where every educated Scotsman did until the time of the

⁴⁶ In 1838 Carlyle published an article on Scott for the London and Westminster Review, describing Scott's literary authority in terms of his commercial value. Given Carlyle's spiritual ethic, which privileged the transcendent and ethereal above the earthly and material, Carlyle's critique of Scott is implicitly denigrating. "His life was worldly, his ambitions were worldly. There is nothing spiritual in him; all is economical, material, of the earth, earthly." Caroline McCracken-Flescher in a paper presented at the 2001 conference: 'The Carlyles in Scotland and Europe' argues that Carlyle's reduction of Scott to base monetary values was intended to topple Scott's ascendancy in order to leave room for a new authority in the shape of Carlyle himself.

Carlyle fashion.’⁴⁷ Thereafter, Carlyle originated a new inventive language for the nineteenth century (so prevalent that its detractors named it ‘Carlylese’) In the final analysis the central difference between these two writers is that ‘where the Carlylean hero is self-authorizing’,⁴⁸ Miller gains his authority by allegiance.

In the context of this thesis, it is not possible to offer a full survey into the lives and works of Scottish autodidactic writers such as Tannahill, Cunningham, Wilson, Thom, and the brothers Bethune. There is still much critical investigation to be done in order to unearth the works of these neglected writers and very little research has been undertaken into considerations of their writing as a school - a ‘working class canon’ such as that which Miller had conceived. However, even a brief consideration, such as this one, reveals a remarkable degree of shared experience and approach in these writers’ work. In the self-conscious mediation of identity, which marks such literary negotiations, a palpable anxiety is manifest within the self-taught Scottish writer. This is true, even of the more successful writers such as Hogg and Carlyle. Raised from humble circumstances and in the traditional communities of rural Scotland, there is a sense in which even these writers experienced an antagonistic relationship to the elite and established circles of the Edinburgh *literati*. Undoubtedly, Carlyle was the most successful of all these, but with the significant caveat that he felt compelled to leave Scotland for London as early as 1834 in order to achieve literary recognition.

⁴⁷ W.M. MacKenzie, *Hugh Miller: A Critical Study*, p. 26.

⁴⁸ Vanden Bosche, *Carlyle and the Search for Authority*, p.46.

Appendix D:
From Poems of A Journeyman Mason

Ode to Jeanie

Sister, Jeanie, haste we'll go
 To whare the white star'd gowans grow,
 Wi' the puddock flower of golden hue,
 The snaw drop white and the bonny violet blue.

Sister, Jeanie, haste, we'll go
 To whare the blossom'd lilacs grow,
 To whare the pine tree dark an' high
 Is pointing its tap at the cloudless sky.

Jeanie, mony a merry lad
 Is sung in the young leav'd wood to-day;
 Flits on light wing the dragon-flee;
 An' hums on the flowrie the big red bee.

Down the burnie works its way,
 Aneath the bending birken sray,
 An' wimples round the green moss stane,
 An' mourns (I kenna why) wi' ceaseless mane.

Jeanie, come, thy days o' play
 Soon, very soon, shall haste away;
 Soon shall these scenes in darkness cast,
 Be ravag'd wild by the wild winter blast

Though to thee a spring may rise
 Though scenes as fair salute thine eyes,
 An' though fu' mony a cloudless day
 Shall dawn, an' Jeanie be heartsome an' gay;

He wha grasps thy little hand
 Nae langer at thy side shall stand;

Nor o'er the flow'r besprinkl'd brae
Lead thee the bonniest an' the shortest way.

Dost thou see yon bed sae green,
Fenc'd roun' wi' mony a sculpur'd stane?
A few short weeks o' pain shall fly,
A' asleep in that bed shall thy puir brither lie.

Then thy mither's tears awhile
May chide thy joy an' damp thy smile;
But soon ilk grief shall wear awa,
An I'll be forgotten by ane an' by a'.

Dinna think the thought is sad,
Life vex'd me aft, but this makes me glad,
While cauld my heart, an' clos'd my e'e,
Bonny shall the dreams o' my slumb'ring be.

Ode to My Mither Tongue

I lo'e the tones in mine ear that rung
In the days whan care was unkenn'd to me;
Ay, I lo'e thee weel my mither tongue,
Tho' gloom the sons o' lear at thee.
Ev'n now, though little skill'd to sing,
I've rax'd me down thy simple lyre;
O! while I sweep ilk sounding string,
Nymph of my mither tongue, inspire!

I lo'e thee weal my mither tongue,
Nane ither sure can match wi' thee!
Thine were the strains by nourice sung
Whan pleas'd I sat on the careful knee.
Ah! He whose loss I'll aye bewail,
Aft, sooth'd in thee my sorrows vain;
Alas! That heart sae warm an' leal,
Suld lie in the cauld unlovely main.

Of hue diverse my minutes fled
 Whan I was feckless, young an' sma'
 An' how much checker'd o'er my head
 Life's riper years flit fast awa;
 For pain, my mither tongue an' grief
 Comes mony a weary way to me;
 What makes these pains an' sorrows brief?
 The friendly solace pour'd in thee.

O lo'e thee weel my mither tongue,
 An' a thy tales, or sad or wild;
 Right early to my heart they've clung,
 Right soon my dark'ning thoughts beguil'd,
 Ay, aft to thy sangs o' a lang syne day,
 That tell o' the bluidy fight sublime
 I've listened, till died the present away,
 An return'd the deeds o' departed time.

An' gloom the sons o' lear at thee?
 An' art thou reckon'd poor and mean?
 Ah! Could I tell as weel's I see
 O' a' thou art, an' a; thoust has been!
 In thee has sung th'enraptur'd bard
 His triumphs over pain and care;
 In courts an' camps thy voice was heard,
 Aft heard within the house o' pray'r.

In thee, whan come proud England's might
 Wi' its steel to dismay, and its gold to seduce,
 Blaz'd the bright soul o' the Wallace wight,
 And the patriot thoughts o' the noble Bruce.
 Thine were the rousing strains that breath'd
 Frae the warrior bard ere clos'd the frae,
 Thine whan victory his temples wreath'd,
 The sang that arose o'er the prostrate fae.

An' loftier still, the enraptur'd saint,
 Whan the life o' time was glimm'ring awa,
 Joyful o' heart, though feeble and faint,
 Tauld in thee o' the glories he saw
 O' the visions bright o' a coming life,
 O' angels that joy o'er the closing grave,
 An' o' Him that bure turmoil and strife,
 The children o' death to succour an' save.

An' aft what the bluid hounds track'd the heath,
 Whan follow'd the bands o' the bluidy Dundee,*
 The sang o' praise, and the pray'r o' death,
 Arose to Heaven in thee.
 In thee whan Heaven's ain sons were call'd
 To sever ilk link o' the papal chain,
 Thunder'd the ire o' that champion bauld⁺
 Whom threat'nings an' dangers assail'd in vain.

The Mary whose trust was the hosts o' her land,[€]
 The Mary whose crown was a circle of wae,[~]
 The Mary whose god was the lighted brand,⁺⁺
 At the frown o' that champion wither'd away.
 Ev'n the tyrant o' France, wha rejoic'd in his guile
 When the bluid o' the Hug'not was patt'ring like rain"
 At the curse o' that champion wax'd restless an' pale.

Ah mither tongue, in days o' yore
 Fu' mony a noble bard was thine,
 The clerk o' Dunkeld,[^] an' the coothie Dunbar,^{“(}
 An' the best o' the Stewart line;[&]

* Viscount Dundee

⁺ Knox

[€] Mary of Guise, Queen Regent

[~] Mary of Scotland

⁺⁺ Mary of England

["] Charles IX of France

[^] Gavin Douglas

^{“(} Will Dunbar

[&] James I of Scotland

An' him who tauld o' the Suthron wrang[%]
 Cow'd by the might o' Scottish men,
 Him o' the Mount an' the the gleeesome sang[™]
 An' him o' the pride o' Hawthornden.[™]

Of bard were thine in latter days
 Sma' need to tell my mither tongue;
 Right bauld an' slee were Fergie's lays,
 An' roar'd the laugh whan Ramsay sung
 But wha without a tear can name
 The swain this warl' shall ne'er forget!
 Thine mither tongue his sangs o' fame, -
 'Twill learning be to ken thee yet.

For him wha now essays the lyre
 That thrill'd sae sweet in bye-gane time,
 Scarce haufins warm'd wi' minstrel fire,
 An' little skill'd in lear o' rhyme,
 What meed remains? hope that his sang,
 Rude though it be, an' harsh I ween,
 May shaw fu' lang my mither tongue
 That neither weak my muse nor mean.

[%] Barbour

[™] Sir David Lindsay of the Mount

Appendix E:

Introductory Index to *The Cruise of the Betsey**

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Preparation – Departure – Recent and Ancient Monstrosities – A Free Church Yacht – Down the Clyde – Jura – Prof. Walker's Experiment – Whirlpool near Scarba – Geological Character of Western Highlands – An Illustration – Different Ages of Outer and Inner Hebrides – Mt. Blane and the Himalayas "mere upstarts" – Esdaile Quarries – Oban – A Section through Conglomerate and Slate examined – McDouglas's Dog-stone – Power of the Ocean to move Rocks – Sound of Mull – The Betsey – The Minister's Cabin – Village of Tobermory – The "Florida", a Wreck of the Invincible Armada – Geologic Exploration and Discovery – At Anchor. 15

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* 1862 edition (Boston: Gould and Lincoln).

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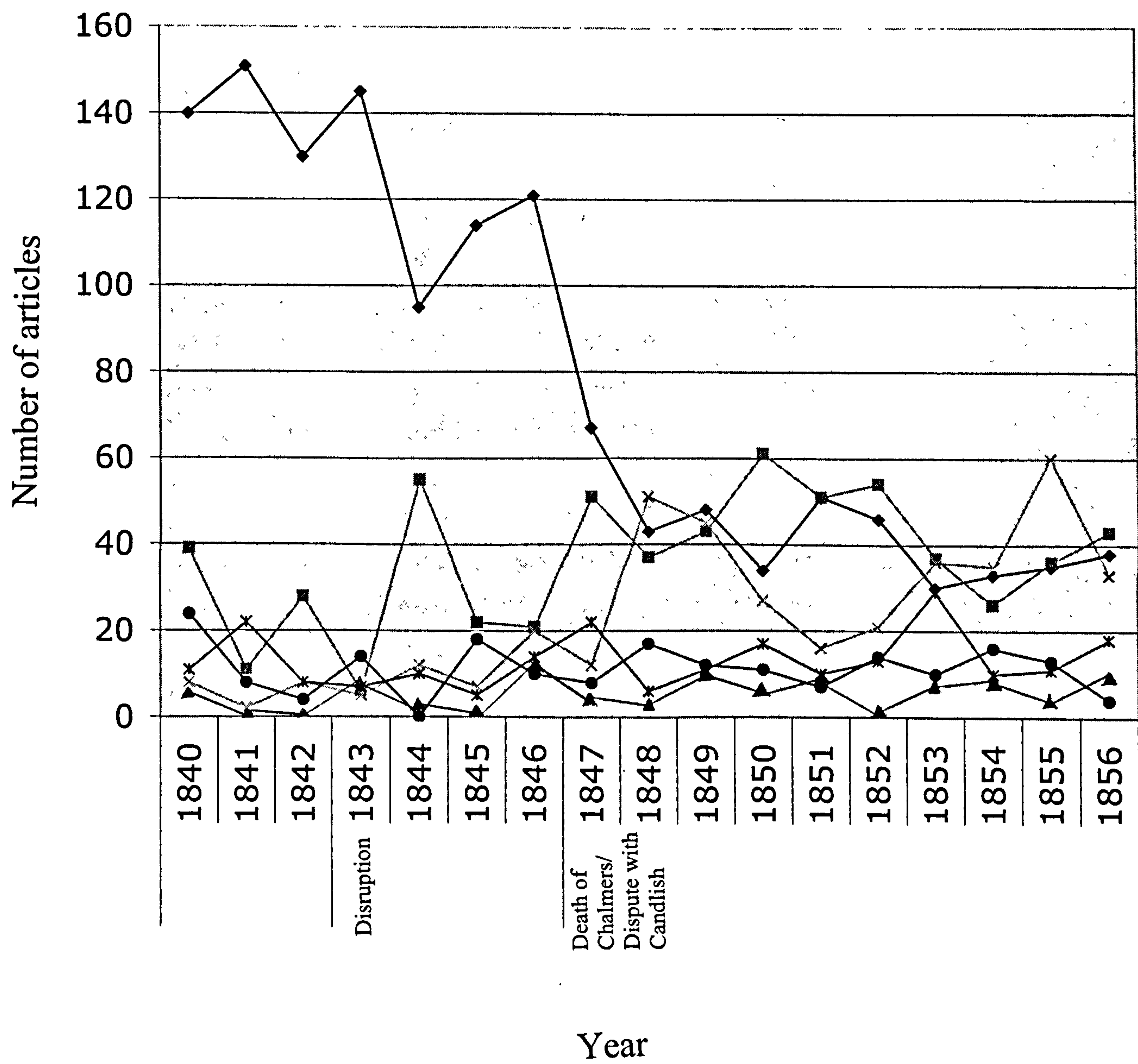
Outliers of the Weald and the Oolite – Description of the Weald at Linksfield – Mr. Duff's *Lepidotus minor* – Eccentric Types of Fish Scales – Visit to the Sandstones of Scat-Craig – Fine suit of Fossils at Scat-Craig – True graveyard Bones, not mere Impressions – Varieties of pattern – The Diker's "Carved Flowers" – *Stagonolepis*, a new Genus – Termination of the Ramble. 212

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Appendix F:
Diagrammatic Analysis of Miller's *Witness* Subjects 1840 – 1856



- ◆ Ecclesiastic
- Socio-Political
- ▲ Scots Cultural
- × Int. Politics
- * Literature
- Scientific

Analysis of Diagram

The figures which inform this diagram are drawn from Michael Shortland’s extensive bibliography of *Witness* articles between 1840 and 1856 (*Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science*, Appendix A pp. 303 – 369)*. I am less concerned with the accurate representation of numbers of articles dealing with socio-political, Scots cultural, international, literary and scientific subjects except as to indicate their amount relative to the number of ecclesiastic articles before and after 1847

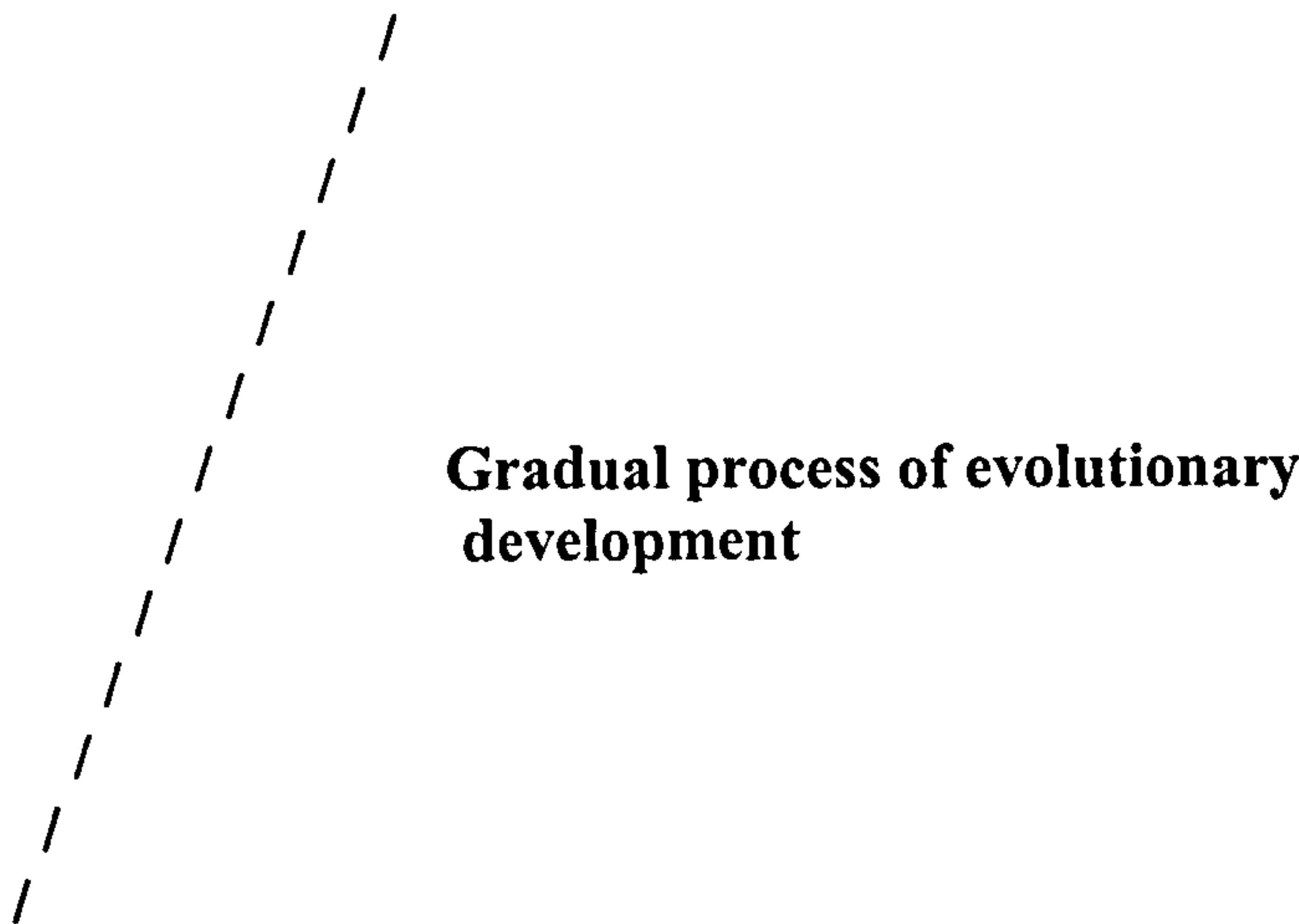
From 1840 – 1847 numbers of articles dealing with ecclesiastic subjects are high (despite a relative drop in numbers during 1843) compared with numbers of articles dealing with other subjects. In 1847 there is a dramatic drop in numbers of articles dealing with ecclesiastic subjects (from 121 in 1846 to just 67 during 1847). After 1847, the numbers of articles dealing with religious subjects never recovers. During 1847 Miller took a brief leave of his editorial duties and travelled in England submitting the articles which would later be published as *First Impressions of England And Its People*. Upon his return, Miller was challenged with demotion from his position as Editor. 1847 was also the year of Chalmers’s death. Significant numbers of articles, which make up the total figures of articles dealing with ecclesiastic subjects after 1847, deal with the subject of Thomas Chalmers alone and several are factual General Assembly Reports. 1847 sees a concurrent rise in the number of articles dealing with socio-political and international topics. Miller devoted a considerable number of articles to the outbreak of revolutionary activity in France and, around this time Britain was involved in several international campaigns, including wars in Turkey and the Crimea, which accounts for the increased number of articles dealing with international politics. With less space devoted exclusively to ecclesiastic matters after 1847, Miller was able to focus increasingly on his socio-political agendas as well as on literary and scientific subjects.

* The Witness Articles 1840 – 1856

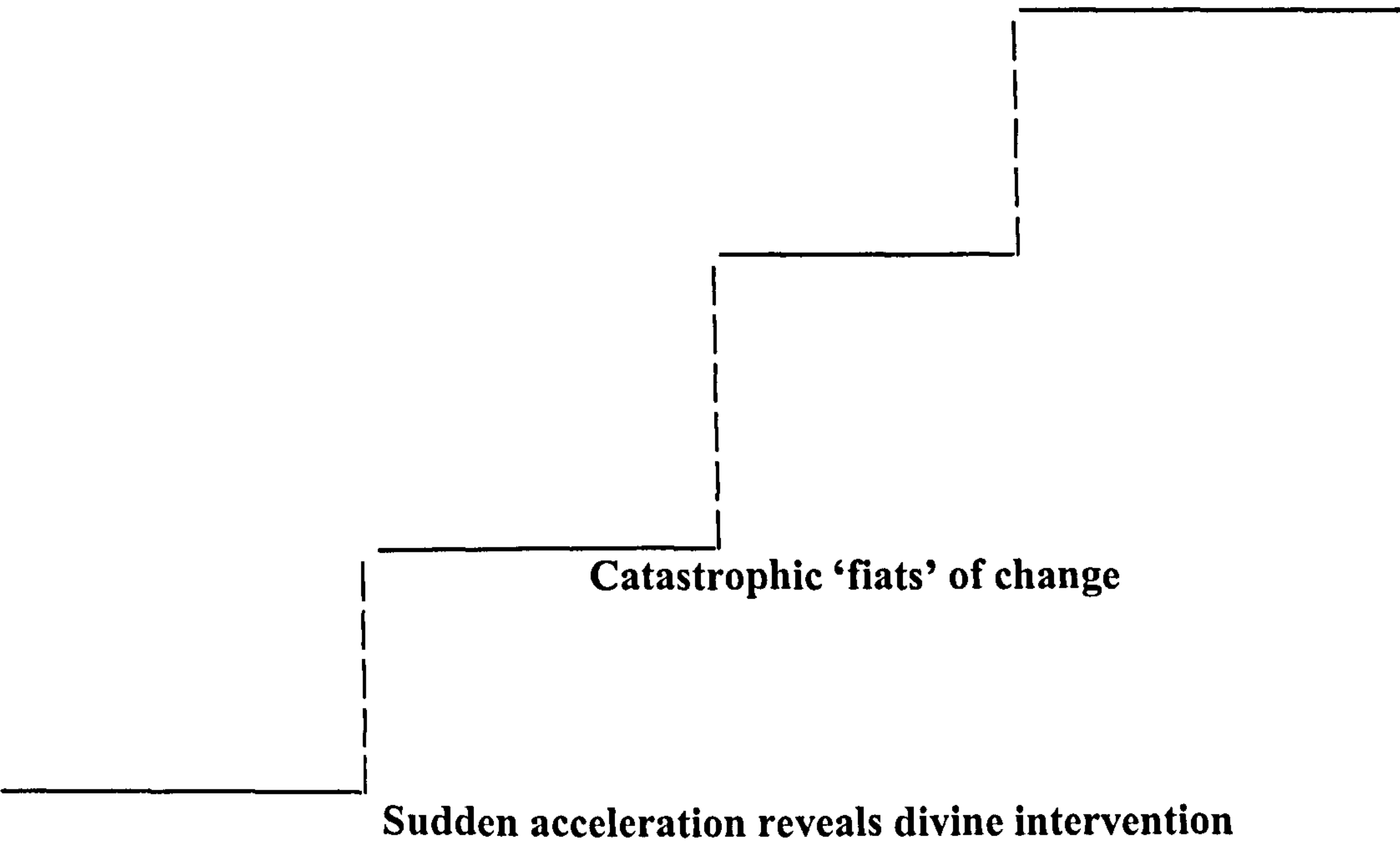
	Ecclesiastic	Socio-Political	Scots Cultural	Int. Politics	Literature	Scientific
1840	140	39	6	8	11	24
1841	151	11	3	2	22	8
1842	130	28	0	8	8	4
<i>The Disruption</i>						
1843	145	6	9	5	7	14
1844	95	55	4	12	10	0
1845	114	22	2	7	5	18
1846	121	21	11	20	14	10
<i>Death of Chalmers/Candlish's Proposal</i>						
1847	67	51	4	12	22	8
1848	43	37	3	51	6	17
1849	48	43	10	45	11	12
1850	34	61	6	27	17	11
1851	51	51	8	16	10	7
1852	46	54	1	21	13	14
1853	30	37	7	36	29	10
1854	33	26	8	35	10	16
1855	35	36	4	60	11	13
1856	38	43	10	33	18	4

Appendix G:
Diagrammatic Illustration of Miler’s Catastrophic Theory

1. Evolutionary theory



2. Miller’s Creationist theory



Appendix H:
A Chronology of Miller's Life and Works

1802

Hugh Miller born in Cromarty

1820 – 1822

Miller begins apprenticeship as a stonemason

1823

First visit to Edinburgh

Period of religious conversion

1828

Miller turns down an invitation to join the Highland regiment.

1829

Poems of A Journeyman Mason

Miller writes his autobiographical letter to Principal Baird

Miller refuses Baird's offer to take up a position in Edinburgh periodical writing

Letters on the Herring Fishing in the Moray Firth

1830

Miller takes a post as a bank clerk in the Linlithgow Commercial Bank of Scotland

1831

Returns to Cromarty

Letter from One of the People to the Author of 'Remarks on the Cromarty Chapel Case'

1835

Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland

1837

Marriage to Lydia Fraser

1835 – 1843

Short fictions and essays submitted to Wilson's *Tales of the Borders* and *Chambers's Journal*

1839

Miller meets with Thomas Chalmers for the first time.

Letter to Lord Brougham

1840 – 1856

Miller appointed as Editor of the *Witness* in Edinburgh.

Moves to Edinburgh

1841

The Old Red Sandstone

1843

Disruption of the Church of Scotland

Sutherland As it Was And Is Or How A Country May Be Ruined

1844

Miller's geological ramble around the Hebridean islands

Robert Chambers's *Vestiges of Creation* is published anonymously

1845

Suffering from a return of lethargy and depressive illness, Miller begins his tour of England.

1847

First Impressions of England and Its People

Death of Thomas Chalmers

Candlish advises the demotion of Miller from the *Witness* editorship. Miller replies with a letter addressed to the leading members of the Evangelical party and retains his position.

1849

Footprints of the Creator

1853

Miller passed over for the Chair of Natural History in Edinburgh, in favour of Edward Forbes.

1854

My Schools and Schoolmasters

1855

Millers turns down the post of Distributor of Stamps for Perthshire, offered to him by Lord Breadalbane.

1856

Death of Miller

1857

The Testimony of the Rocks

1858

The Cruise of the Betsey

1859

Sketch-book of Popular Geology

1863

Tales and Sketches

1864

Edinburgh and its Neighbourhood

Bibliography

Primary texts: Hugh Miller

Poems, Written in the Leisure Hours of A Journeyman Mason (Inverness: R. Carruthers, 1829)

Letters on the Herring Fishing in the Moray Firth (Inverness: R. Carruthers, 1829)

The Traditional History of Cromarty (Inverness: R. Carruthers, 1834)

Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland; or, The Traditional History of Cromarty (Edinburgh: W. P. Nimmo, Hay and Mitchell, 1889; originally published 1835)

Letter from One of the Scotch People to the Right Hon. Lord Brougham & Vaux, on the Opinions Expressed by his Lordship on the Auchterarder Case reprinted in *The Headship of Christ* ed. by Peter Bayne ((1861) 3rd edn Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1870; originally published 1839) pp. 1 – 22

The Whiggism of the Old School, as Exemplified by the Past History and Present Position of the Church of Scotland (Edinburgh: John Johnson, 1839)

Memoir of William Forsyth, Esqu. A Scotch Merchant of the Eighteenth Century (London: Stewart and Murray, 1839)

The Old Red Sandstone; or, New Walks in an Old Field (17th edn Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1873; originally published 1841)

Sutherland As It Was And Is: or, How A Country May be Ruined reprinted in *Leading Articles on Various Subjects by Hugh Miller* ed. by Rev. John Davidson ((1870) 3rd edn Edinburgh: W. P. Nimmo, 1871; originally printed in *The Witness*, 1843) pp. 388 - 435

The Tennant's True Quarrel (Edinburgh: John Johnson, 1846)

Letter from Hugh Miller (Edinburgh: n.p, 14 January, 1847)

First Impressions of England And Its People (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, Hay and Mitchell, 1889; originally published 1847)

Footprints of the Creator; or, The Asterolepis of Stromness (5th edition with a 'Memoir of the Author' by Louis Agassiz, edited with 'Prefatory Remarks' by Mrs Lydia Miller Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1861; originally published 1849)

An Unspoken Speech (Edinburgh: John Johnson and Hunter, 1850)

Thoughts on the Educational Question; or, the Battle of Scotland (Edinburgh, W. P Nimmo, 1850)

The Two Records; Mosiac and Geological (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1854)

My Schools and Schoolmasters: or, The Story of my Education (Edinburgh: B & W Publishing, 1993; originally published 1854)

Geology versus Astronomy: or, the Conditions and the Periods; being a View of the Modifying Effects of Geological Discovery on the Old Astronomic Inferences respecting the Plurality of Inhabited Worlds (Glasgow: James R. Macnair, 1855)

Strange but True: Incidents in the Life of Dr John Kitto (Edinburgh: Shepherd and Elliot, 1856)

The Testimony of the Rocks; or, Geology in its Bearing on the Two Theologies Natural and Revealed (Cambridge: St. Matthew Publishing, 2001; originally published 1857)

The Cruise of the Betsey; or, A Summer Ramble among the Fossiliferous Deposits of the Hebrides. With Rambles of A Geologist; or, Ten Thousand Miles over the Fossiliferous Deposits of Scotland (7th edn Edinburgh: W. P. Nimmo, 1869; originally published 1858)

Sketch-book of Popular Geology; being a Series of lectures Delivered before the Philosophical Institution of Edinburgh. With a Preface by Mrs Lydia Miller (3rd edn Edinburgh: William. P. Nimmo, 1869; originally published 1859)

The Headship of Christ, and the Rights of the Christian People ed. by Peter Bayne (3rd edn Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1870; originally published 1861)

Essays, Historical and Biographical, Political and Social, Literary and Scientific ed. by Peter Bayne (4th edn Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1870; originally published 1862)

Tales and Sketches (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1863)

Edinburgh and its Neighbourhood, Geological and Historical: With the Geology of the Bass Rock ed. by Mrs Lydia Miller (4th edn Edinburgh: W. P. Nimmo, 1870; originally published 1864)

Leading Articles on Various Subjects ed. by Rev. John Davidson (3rd edn Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1871; originally published 1870)

Manuscripts

Miller, Hugh, 'Letterbook', Edinburgh New College Library MS (MIL.1.1) (Containing personal correspondence sent and received by Miller between 1829 and 1835, including some poems).

----- 'letters and correspondence', National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh (MS 7516, fol. 49 – 188) (Containing correspondence sent and received by Miller between 1822 and 1855, including letters to and from Alexander Stewart, John Swanson, Lydia Fraser and Peter Bayne. Most letters relate to the business of *The Witness*).

----- 'correspondence and papers', National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh (MS 7528, fol. 14-37, 64-66) (Containing correspondence 1834 – 1840, 1844 – 46, 1849 – 50 Most letters relate to the business of *The Witness*).

Williamson, Hugh Miller, 'Life of Hugh Miller' (1881), National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh (MS 7527) ('Corrective' biography to that produced by Peter Bayne and Lydia Miller).

Witness Articles

1840

15 January	Untitled editorial on the aims of the <i>Witness</i> , 'The Two Parties in the Church of Scotland'
5 February	'Twin Presbyteries of Strathbogie'
8 February	'The Two Students', 'The Theological Students of Glasgow and St Andrews'
12 February	'The Presentation to Daviot'
22 February	'The Communicants of the North Country'
4 March	'The Literary Character of Knox'
7 March	'Criticism for the Uninitiated', 'The Lords and the Church Question'
20 March	'The Scotch Poor Law'
25 March	'The "Grasping Ambition" of the Non-Intrusionists'
11 March	'Criticism for the Uninitiated'
21 March	'Pauperism – The Last Meeting', 'Criticism for the Uninitiated'
28 March	'Criticism for the Uninitiated'
8 April	'Criticism for the Uninitiated'
15 April	'Our First Year of Labour'
22 April	'Criticism for the Uninitiated', 'The Two Parties'
6 May	'The Late Dr Thomas McCrie. Article First', 'Climbing Boys – Chimney Sweeping'
9 May	'The Earl of Aberdeen's Bill'
13 May	'The Late Dr Thomas McCrie. Article Second'
16 May	'The Late Dr Thomas McCrie. Article Third'
20 May	'Remains of Napoleon', 'The Scotch People'
6 June	'Moderatism Popular, Where and Why'
17 June	'The Late Dr Thomas McCrie. Article Fourth', 'The Earl of Aberdeen <i>versus</i> the people of Scotland'
24 June	'The Late Dr Thomas McCrie. Article Fifth'
27 June	'The Late Dr Thomas McCrie. Concluding Article'
4 July	'The Presbytery of Edinburgh'
8 July	'Lord Brougham and the Church Question'
25 July	'The Herring Fishery. Article First'
5 August	'The Herring Fishery. Article Second'
8 August	'The Herring Fishery. Article Third'
19 August	'The Scott Monument'
2 September	'Revival in Alness'
14 October	'Conservatism on Revivals'
22 October	'Review of <i>The Poems of John Bethune</i> (1840)'
9 December	'The Working Man's College'

1841

27 January	'The Outrage at Marnoch'
3 February	'Supplementary Notes of the Settlement at Marnoch'
14 April	'Scottish Landed Proprietors and the Poor Laws'
17 April	'Scottish Proprietors and the Poor'
24 April	'Food for D'Israeli' [sic]
22 May	'The General Assembly'
25 May	'The General Assembly'
29 May	'The General Assembly'
1 June	'The General Assembly'
5 June	'Lawyers – Their Two Classes'
16 June	'Dr Cooke's Interruption'
7 August	Untitled article on politics and religion in Scotland

22 September	'An Illustration of the Bothy System', 'Moderatism, some of its Better Classes'
23 October	'The Poet Montgomery'
3 November	'The Late Fire'
29 December	'The True and the Counterfeit'

1842

1 January	'An Episcopalian on the Independence of the Church'
8 January	'Defence Associations'
22 January	'The Cottages of Our Hinds'
9 February	'Translations into Fact'
12 February	'Translations into Fact'
16 February	'Translations into Fact'
5 March	Review of Patrick Duff, <i>Sketch of the Geology of Moray</i> (1842)
9 March	Review of Patrick Duff, <i>Sketch of the Geology of Moray</i> (1842)
13 April	Review of Patrick Duff, <i>Sketch of the Geology of Moray</i> (1842)
30 April	'The Encyclopaedia Britannica'
7 May	'The Chartist Petition'
11 May	'The Chartist Petition'
25 May	'The Two Conflicts'
23 July	'On Industrial Schools – the School at Aberdeen'
10 August	'Annie McDonald and the Fifeshire Forester'
10 September	'Royal Progresses, Recent and Remote'
12 October	'Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Classes'
23 November	'First Principles'
3 December	'Conclusion of the War in Affghanistan' [sic]
21 December	'The Legislative Court'
24 December	'Tendencies' [in the Church of Scotland]
28 December	'Tendencies'

1843

4 January	'Tendencies'
11 January	'Tendencies' [on establishment and disestablishment]
14 January	'Mr Forsyth's "Remarks"'
15 February	'The Anticipated Poor-Law'
4 March	'Scotch Poor Law', 'Industrial Schools'
12 April	'The Two Mr Clarks'
20 May	'The Disruption'
1 June	'The Close'
3 June	'Locheil's Warning'
10 June	'Union and its Principles'
21 June	'Sir William's Demonstration'
12 July	'The Calotype – Invented by Henry Fox Talbot'
23 September	'Dr Chalmers'
18 October	'Railway Sabbath Desecration'
13 December	'More Moderate Science'

1844

23 March	'The Late Mr Kemp'
20 April	'Religious Prospects of Scotland in Connection with the Free Church'
21 May	'Our First Year' [of the Free Church]
1 June	'The Cheap Publication Overture'
22 June	'Cheap Publication Scheme'
24 August	'The Burns' Festival'
4 September	'A Highland Clearing'

18 December 'The Slavery Question'

1845

1 January 'The New Year'
 22 January 'A Voice from the Greyfriars'
 7 May 'The New Poor-law'
 2 July 'The New Poor-law'
 30 July 'The Late Earl Grey'
 6 September Review of Poems by William Anderson (1845)
 27 September 'The Centenary of the "Forty-Five"'
 1 October 'The Cromwell Controversy'

1846

28 January 'The Tenant's True Quarrel'
 18 February 'Our Scottish Tenantry'
 15 April 'The Sanctities of Matter'
 2 May 'Is Sir Robert Peel in Earnest on the Corn Bill?'
 17 June 'Dr Robert Lorimer'
 19 September 'Potato Failure – State of the Highlands'
 21 October 'The Times' Commissioner' [on Highland Clearances]
 25 November 'Destitution in the Highlands and Islands'
 12 December 'Past and Present Condition of the Highlands'

1847

2 January 'The Highland Destitution – The Provost's Explanation'
 20 January 'Highland Destitution'
 3 February 'Is Game Property?', 'Past and Present State of the Highlands'
 13 February 'The Crime-Making Laws'
 17 February 'The Destitution'
 20 February 'A Plea for Ragged Schools'
 24 March 'The Cheap Publication Scheme'
 28 April 'The Abbotsford Baronetcy'
 8 May 'Sir Wm Hamilton and Archdeacon Hare'
 1 June 'Death of Dr Chalmers'
 5 June 'The Funeral of Chalmers'
 23 June 'Dr Chalmers on the Educational Question'
 21 August 'The Echoes of the World' [on Dr Chalmers]
 1 September 'Glen Tilt Tabooed'
 13 November 'The Late Rev. Alexander Stewart'

1848

1 January Review of *Passages in the Life of an English Heiress* (1847) [by Lydia Miller, published anonymously]
 9 February 'Disruption Principles'
 1 March 'The Third French Revolution'
 8 March 'Outbreak in Edinburgh' [on political disturbances]
 7 June 'The Franchise'
 24 June 'Our Ragged Schools'
 30 December 'Annus Mirabilis'

1849

21 March 'York Hotel' [working-class dwelling in Edinburgh]
 31 March 'York Hotel – No II'
 14 April 'Lectures to the Working Classes' [review of William G. Blaikie, *Six Lectures to the Working Class on their Temporal Condition*, 1849]

25 April	'York Hotel – No III'
8 September	'Highland Clearings'
12 September	'The Depopulation of the Highlands'
15 September	'Dwellings for the Working Classes', 'The Depopulation of the Highlands. Second Article'
19 September	'The Depopulation of the Highlands. Third Article'.
22 September	'The Depopulation of the Highlands. Fourth Article'.
26 September	'National Evils and Practical Remedies' [Review of James S. Buckingham <i>National Evils and Practical Remedies</i> (1849)]
October 27	'Literature of the People'
10 November	'The Peace Meetings'
5 December	'The People Their Own Best Portrait Painters'

1850

30 January	'The Late Lord Jeffrey'
30 January	'Chalmers on the Educational Question'
13 February	'The Educational Question'
16 February	'The Educational Question'
23 February	'The Educational Question'
27 February	'The Educational Question'
2 March	'The Educational Question'
9 March	'The Educational Question'
16 March	'The Educational Question'
27 April	'Death of the Poet Wordsworth'
4 May	'Social Reform'
13 July	'Unity of the Human Races'
20 July	'A Visit to St Kilda'
4 September	'The Works of John Owen'
5 October	'The "Guardian" versus The "Scottish Press"'
2 November	'Pauper Labour'
14 December	'The Unspoken Speech – Scottish Young Men's Society'
18 December	'The Barra Refugees'
21 December	'The Expatriated Highlanders of Barra'
28 December	'The Barra Refugees'

1851

1 January	'The Half Century'
22 February	'Female Education' [review of <i>Female Education, its Importance, Design and Nature Considered</i> (1851) by 'a Labourer's Daughter']
15 March	'Highland Destitution'
22 March	'Highland Destitution'
21 April	'Social Reform and the Franchise'
26 July	'Periodicalism', 'Highland Destitution'
9 August	'The Late William Hamilton Esq.'.
20 September	'The Highlands'
15 October	'The Exhibition. Parting Impressions'
18 October	'Parting Impressions'
10 December	'The French Revolution'
17 December	'Progress of the French Revolution'

1852

17 March	'The Working Classes'
24 March	'Periodical Literature – The Late Lord Jeffrey'
18 September	'The Duke of Wellington'
6 November	'Pauper Labour'

4 December 'The Untaught Poets'

1853

2 February Review of *Kitto's Journal of Sacred Literature* (1853)
 26 February 'The Peace Policy' [France]
 19 March 'Our Best Ramparts' [on peace in Europe]
 25 June 'The Working Man's Half Holiday'
 29 June 'Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights'
 9 July 'The Working Man's Half Holiday'
 13 July 'Scottish Universities'
 28 September 'Why Go to War?' [Turkey and Russia]
 8 October 'A Luckless Experiment' [on the Highlands and Islands]
 22 October 'Carruther's Pope' [review of Robert Carruthers, *The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope*, 1853]
 16 November 'Industrial Schools *versus* Prisons'
 17 December 'Resignation of Lord Palmerston'

1854

21 January 'The Strikes'
 11 February 'War at Last' [Turkey and Russia]
 15 April 'Our Scottish Universities'
 13 May 'The Strikes'
 3 June 'Centralization' [of political life]
 17 June 'Our Working Classes'
 24 June 'Peasant Properties'
 19 July 'Shall We Negotiate Again?' [with the Russian Czar]
 26 July 'The Insurrection in Spain'
 19 August 'A Just Quarrel' [Britain *versus* Russia]
 26 August 'Dugald Stewart'
 20 September 'Geology *versus* Astronomy'
 25 October 'The Spaces and the Periods'
 29 November 'Poland – Her Past and Present Prospects'

1855

3 January Review of James Lorimer, *Our Scottish Universities* (1854)
 27 January 'The Indian Civil Service Reform'
 10 February 'The War and Some of its Lessons'
 28 February 'Mission to China'
 10 March 'Secret History of the Crimean Expedition'
 24 March 'Our Operative Shoemakers'
 19 May 'Honorary MPs and Working MPs'
 27 June 'Shall we Reconstruct Poland?'
 5 September 'The Impending Crisis in Italy'
 29 September 'The Highlands'
 6 October 'The Highlands'
 18 October 'Eugene Sue'
 17 November 'Scottish University Reform'
 19 December 'Little Dorrit' [review of Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, No. 1, December, 1855]
 26 December 'The Poetry of Rodgers'

1856

12 January 'Our Novel Literature'
 6 February 'Macaulay on Scotland'
 13 February 'Macaulay on Scotland. Article Second'

16 February	'A Five-Pound Qualification'
27 February	'Macaulay on Scotland. Article Third'
19 March	'Robert Burns' [poem]
9 April	'Are We to Have War with America?'
30 April	'The Terms of Peace'
30 May	'A Strange Story, But True'
14 June	'Characteristics of the War'
12 July	'Edinburgh An Age Ago'
19 July	'The Idealistic School'
6 August	'D'Israeli on Politics' [sic]
23 August	'The Amenities of Literature'
29 November	'The Felons of The Country'
20 December	'The Poesy of Intellect and Fancy'
27 December	Obituary of Hugh Miller
31 December	Obituary of Hugh Miller

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